

Defending Damascus, Betraying Beirut: Hezbollah's Communication Strategies in the Syrian
Civil War

Research Thesis

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation
with research distinction in International Studies in the undergraduate
colleges of The Ohio State University

by

Maxwell Scurlock

The Ohio State University

April 2017

Project Advisor: Professor Jeffrey Lewis, International Studies

Table of Contents

Part 1 – Background Information and Historical Context

Introduction – 1

1. **Historical and Contextual Background** – 6
 - a. Shi‘ism in Historical Context – 9
 - b. French Mandatory Period, 1920-1945 – 10
 - c. Independence to Black September, 1945-1970 – 14
 - d. The Early Years of the Lebanese Civil War and the Emergence of Hezbollah, 1970-1982 – 17
 - e. Hezbollah’s Formation – 21
 - f. Hezbollah’s Early Ideological Framework – 23
 - g. Syrian and Israeli Occupations of Lebanon, 1982-2005 – 24
 - h. Political Turmoil, 2006 Lebanon War, and 2008 Lebanese Political Crisis – 29
 - i. Hezbollah’s 2009 Manifesto – 31
 - j. The Syrian Civil War – 32
 - k. Sunni Islamists in Lebanon and Syria – 34
 - l. Lebanese Christians – 37

Part 2 – Analysis of Hezbollah’s Communications

2. **Theoretical Approach to Hezbollah’s Communications** – 40
3. **Hezbollah in Syria** – 44
 - a. Hezbollah’s Participation in Syria – April 30th, 2013 – 44
 - b. The Campaign for al-Qusayr, Part One – May 9th, 2013 – 48
 - c. The Campaign for al-Qusayr, Part Two – May 25th, 2013 – 50
4. **Hezbollah’s Responses to Terrorism** – 54
 - a. An Attack in *al-Dahieh* – August 16th, 2013 – 54
 - b. The Bombing of Iran’s Embassy – November 19th, 2013 – 56
5. **Further Crises** – 62
 - a. The Assassination of Hezbollah Commander Hassan al-Laqqis – December 3rd, 2013 – 62
 - b. Martyrs’ Day – February 16th, 2014 – 66
 - c. Nasrallah’s Press Conference on Syria – March 29th, 2014 – 67

6. Analysis and Conclusion – 69
 - a. Analysis – 69
 - b. Have Hezbollah's Communication Strategies Been Effective?
 - c. Conclusion – 79
 - d. Further Research – 82
- Works Cited – 83

PART ONE

Introduction

On November 19th, 2013, two suicide bombers from the Abdullah Azzam Brigades, al-Qaeda's Lebanese affiliate, blasted through the front of Iran's embassy in Beirut, Lebanon in retaliation for Iran's participation in and support of Hezbollah and Bashar al-Assad's regime in the Syrian Civil War. While many similar attacks have tragically afflicted a Lebanon polarized by the conflict in neighboring Syria, the embassy bombing is particularly symbolic given Iran's record of sponsoring terrorism in Lebanon and elsewhere. In what is considered by some to be the first modern suicide bombing, the dissident Iraqi Islamic *Da'wa* Party, with support from Iran, bombed the Iraqi Embassy in Beirut in 1981.¹ Hezbollah, also with Iranian support and guidance, conducted numerous high-profile attacks both inside and outside of Lebanon. Hezbollah and Iran are now on the receiving end of suicide terrorism. The attack on the Iranian Embassy speaks to an identity crisis which has afflicted Hezbollah since Israel's withdrawal from South Lebanon in 2000 and especially since civil war broke out in Lebanon's Syrian neighbor in 2011.

At the heart of Hezbollah's crisis is the group's reliance on both foreign – Iranian and Syrian – backing and grassroots support from Lebanese Shi'is. For most of Hezbollah's history, reconciling these separate chains of support has been a challenging, though ultimately surmountable task. The governments of Iran and Syria, particularly for their support of Palestinian groups, have often been held in high regard by most of the world's Arabs, regardless of religious sect. The Syrian Civil War has brought to Lebanon an increasingly tense sectarian climate – in part due to the influx of well over one million Syrian refugees to the country – and a spate of religiously and ethnically-motivated suicide bombings, such as the bombing of Iran's embassy mentioned above. Hezbollah's Iranian and Syrian allies have been villainized by many of the region's Muslims for contributing to a brutal war, and this criticism has made it difficult for Hezbollah to justify its ties to its Iranian and Syrian allies.

¹ Bruce Hoffman, *Recent Trends and Future Prospects of Iranian Sponsored International Terrorism*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1990), 5. <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a237637.pdf>

Lebanon, with a diverse ethnic and religious makeup and a superb position in the Mediterranean, is one of the world's leading cultural and political centers. Yet given the country's varied population, strategic location, and porous borders, in addition to challenges surrounding the imposition of effective centralized government, the contemporary Lebanese Republic, and previously the region of Mount Lebanon, has historically been subject to foreign sponsorship of religious sects and resultant proxy conflicts.

In 1920, the territory of the modern nation-state of Lebanon was simply carved out of the larger Syrian entity. Despite the arbitrary nature of Lebanon's territorial formation and similarities between Lebanese and Syrians with regard to cultural practices and Arabic dialects, the forces of nationalism have since affected both peoples in important ways. Since this period, both cooperation and conflict have colored the relations between these two states. Syria, though more religiously homogenous than its Lebanese neighbor, is nevertheless home to substantial ethnic and religious minority populations. One of these minority communities, the Alawis, has controlled much of the country's political power since 1970 under the father-son regimes of Hafez and Bashar al-Assad. In 2011, demonstrations against Bashar al-Assad's regime turned violent and led to a full-scale civil war. As the conflict progressed, and as outside powers aligned with certain religious and ethnic communities intervened, the Syrian Civil War went from secular – supporters and opponents of a political regime – to sectarian. Though these sectarian divisions are by no means absolute, most Sunnis have opposed the regime and most non-Sunnis – Alawis, Shi'is, Christians, and others – have supported, or at least tolerated the regime as the lesser of two evils.

Hezbollah has defended the regime of President Bashar al-Assad against the primarily Sunni opposition since the beginning of the conflict in 2011, and the group has openly participated militarily since May 2013. Hezbollah's regional reputation has suffered acutely as result of its involvement in the conflict, with both the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council, two significant regional bodies, labeling Hezbollah as a terrorist group. In addition to these political setbacks, Sunni terrorists have targeted Hezbollah-affiliated population centers in retaliation for the group's participation in the Syrian

conflict. For Hezbollah, a grassroots movement which is heavily dependent upon popular Shi'i support, these blatantly sectarian attacks are very problematic.

This project examines the rhetorical strategies Hezbollah has employed to modify its identity and explain its participation in the Syrian Civil War. Through an examination of a handful of pivotal events in 2013 and 2014, the critical period following Hezbollah's formal announcement of participation in the Syrian conflict, this project will 1) argue that Hezbollah has historically relied on two related central concepts – a) resistance against Israeli and Western aggression and b) support for oppressed and downtrodden Muslims and Arabs – in its ideological formation; 2) demonstrate that Hezbollah has shifted its rhetoric in subtle though significant ways – in an effort to a) portray itself as a staunch defender of religious freedoms, Christians, and the Lebanese system and b) to deemphasize the group's reliance on outside sponsors – in communicating with and justifying its decisions to its Shi'i Lebanese constituency in the context of the Syrian Civil War, during which Hezbollah's ideological framework has been challenged; 3) examine how Hezbollah frames to its constituents the contemporary manifestation of an age-old theological debate concerning *takfir* – excommunication of purported apostates – a concept employed by Sunni extremist groups against their Shi'i counterparts; and 4) apply these findings on Hezbollah's communication strategies to the broader Lebanese context through an examination of supportive and oppositional viewpoints and analyze the implications of these political dynamics.

Since Shi'i Hezbollah signed a memorandum of understanding with Michel Aoun's Maronite Catholic Free Patriotic Movement in 2006, Lebanon's Shi'i and Christian communities have grown closer together politically on both the elite level and amongst average Lebanese civilians.² This shift has been encouraged by Hezbollah, which views Christians as a swing vote in the contentious arenas of Lebanese politics and public opinion.³ The political reforms at the end of the Lebanese Civil War – which increased

² Hassan Nasrallah and Michel Aoun, "Memorandum of understanding by Hezbollah and the Free patriotic movement," *Voltaire Network*, 6 February 2006. <http://www.voltairenet.org/article163916.html>. (accessed 17 March 2017).

³ Hezbollah's rapprochement with Lebanon's Free Patriotic Movement gains an extra layer of irony given Michel Aoun's unique story. From 1989 to 1990, at the end of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), the former leader of the FPM and, since October 2016, Lebanon's president, barricaded himself in Lebanon's presidential palace in Ba'abda and protested Syria's de-facto control of Lebanon. Aoun spent 1990 to 2005 abroad, only returning after the death of Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri and the end of the

the powers of the Lebanese Prime Minister (a position always given to Sunni Muslims) – and the rise of Sunni terrorism have worried Lebanese Shi'is and Christians and help to explain their growing alliance.

One of the main findings of this paper is that the Syrian Civil War, which threatens to destabilize Lebanon, has increased the pace and intensity of Hezbollah's attempts to promote Shi'i-Christian cooperation. Following Hezbollah's announcement of participation in the Syrian Civil War, the group's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah has worked to frame the group's participation in terms friendly to Lebanese Christian nationalism. Nasrallah has framed Hezbollah's intervention in Syria as crucial for protecting Lebanon's system of religious tolerance, minority rights, and societal openness from certain Sunnis who look to impose a bleak form of Islam exemplified by groups such as Jabhat Fatah al-Sham⁴ and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. As will be discussed later, Lebanese Christians, given their low birthrates and high levels of emigration, worry about losing territory, culture, and influence to Muslims. Hezbollah's rhetoric highlighting the group's defense of Lebanon's sovereignty and identity proves appealing to many Christians, and this rhetoric helps Hezbollah both appear patriotic and dissociate itself from Iran and Syria, its politically-tainted allies.

Much of the research into Hezbollah's communication strategies was conducted by analyzing sources from *Al-Manar TV*, Hezbollah's primary media apparatus. To contextualize Hezbollah's communications, the views of other Lebanese actors, some of which align with Hezbollah and others with the rival March 14th Alliance, were analyzed as well. The events around which this analysis is based include Hezbollah's official announcement of its participation in the Syrian conflict and the concurrent battle for the Syrian city of al-Qusayr; bombing attacks on both Hezbollah population centers and Iranian targets; and the assassination of Hassan al-Laqqis, a senior Hezbollah commander.

While other important events occurred within this period (mid-2013 to early 2014), these incidents and the ways in which Hezbollah and its opponents responded to them effectively illustrate

Syrian occupation. Now, Aoun's own FPM is in a strategic alliance with Hezbollah, which has been defending the Syrian government since 2011.

⁴ Jabhat Fatah al-Sham was formerly known as Jabhat al-Nusra, a Sunni group linked to al-Qaeda. Since this paper deals with the period of 2013-2014, prior to the group's rebranding in July 2016, it will be primarily referred to by its first name, Jabhat al-Nusra or the al-Nusra Front.

Hezbollah's unique geopolitical situation. May 2013, in which Hezbollah announced and framed its participation in the Syrian conflict and participated in the large-scale al-Qusayr offensive, ranks among the most important months in the group's history. Unlike localized political assassinations, which have for years been extremely common in Lebanon, Hezbollah has struggled to absorb large suicide bombings against Shi'i Beirutis and Iranian targets. These suicide bombings acquire a morbid irony since Hezbollah largely pioneered this tactic against Israeli, American, and European targets during the Lebanese Civil War.

Rather than confronting its usual Israeli enemy, which has historically won Hezbollah great admiration throughout the Arab world, Hezbollah is deeply embroiled in a messy proxy war and an appalling humanitarian crisis. Hezbollah's decision to publically engage in the Syrian theater carries considerable risk and was not taken lightly by the group's leadership. In fact, Nasrallah at first declined Iranian requests to send large numbers of Hezbollah troops to Syria and only acquiesced after a personal appeal from Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.⁵

Hezbollah forces have taken considerable infantry losses in the Syrian campaign, as evidenced by the high numbers of public funerals conducted by the group. In both Lebanon and Syria, Hezbollah has lost multiple important members of its party leadership – either through confrontations with Syrian rebels or by opportunistic Israeli assassinations – within the context of the group's Syria campaign. These individuals include Hassan al-Laqqis, Jihad Mughniyeh,⁶ Mohamad Issa, Mustafa Badreddine, and Samir al-Quntar.⁷ But Hezbollah's main concern is neither infantry nor leadership losses but the damage that its campaign has done to its reputation and identity. Hezbollah, since its foundation, has marketed itself as a resistance movement against Israel and to a lesser degree against the West.⁸ The Syria campaign has

⁵ Matthew Levitt, *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 383.

⁶ Jihad Mughniyeh was the son of Imad Mughniyeh (d. 2008), the alleged mastermind of some of Hezbollah's most notorious bombings and hijackings in its early days.

⁷ Hadid, Diaa and Anne Barnard, "Commander of Hezbollah Freed by Israel is Killed in Syria," *The New York Times*, December 20, 2015.

⁸ I take the concept of the "West", admittedly a fraught term, but one which is employed by Hezbollah in their speeches, to be the wealthy powers of Western Europe and North America.

severely threatened Hezbollah's identity, and the group has been forced to respond in creative rhetorical ways.

Given Iran's continued sponsorship of Hezbollah, this project is certainly classified under the broad umbrella of studies of the Iran-Saudi Arabia power struggle. Nevertheless, it maintains a distinctive Lebanese character in that its analytical focus is on the state and sub-state levels. This project looks to contribute to the existing literature on the sectarianism of the Arab world by adding a novel perspective on the ways that Hezbollah, a key regional player, has adapted its communications strategies to accommodate itself to a rapidly changing situation.

Paper Structure

The contemporary Lebanese context can only be understood in light of the historical forces that have shaped both the country and its region. The following section provides a brief overview of Shi'i Islam and an account of Lebanon as a political entity since the beginning of the French Mandatory period in 1920, with a focus on the forces that have impacted the Shi'a and given rise to Hezbollah's identity as a protector of the masses against Israeli and Western bellicosity and a champion for the oppressed. This section also discusses the many contradictions between Hezbollah's past and present identities and ideologies, as these contradictions form the backbone of this paper's arguments. Finally, this section presents relevant information on the Syrian Civil War and on contemporary Lebanese Sunni and Christian affairs. Following the historical background is the primary source analysis spanning selected speeches from May 2013 until March 2014. This portion includes some analytical content, and broader themes and implications are discussed in subsequent analysis and conclusion sections.

Chapter 1 – Historical and Contextual Background

Shi'ism in Historical Context

Sunnis and Shi'is make up the two great sects within Islam. Within these two sects are many more divisions based on adherence to Islamic schools of law, historical and theological disputes, and, as is the case for the Alawis, incorporation of syncretistic elements. Today, Sunnis make up approximately 80-90% of all Muslims while Shi'is claim about 10-20% of believers. Shi'i communities are spread throughout the world, but in only a handful of Muslim-majority countries – Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, Azerbaijan, and Lebanon – do Shi'is make up a majority or plurality of the population.

The word Shi'i is short for Shi'at Ali (“partisan of Ali”); the Sunni-Shi'i split originated over the question of who should succeed the Prophet Muhammad after his death in 632 CE. Shi'is contend every successor to Muhammad should come from his family, and that the first successor, or caliph, should have been Ali Ibn Abi Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad. But Shi'is lost this debate, and Islam's first three Caliphs – Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman – were chosen by communal “consensus”, not for their relation to the Prophet Muhammad. Shi'is accordingly reject these first three Caliphs since none came from the immediate family of Muhammad.⁹

After the death of Uthman, Ali was proclaimed Caliph. Ali became the first in a line of Shi'i Imams, the rightful leaders of the Muslim community, all of whom trace blood relations to Muhammad. Ali's reign encompassed the First *Fitna*, a period of sectarian strife and disagreement over the rightful leader of the *umma*, or the Muslim community of believers. Ali died in 661, around the time that Mu'awiya founded the Umayyad Dynasty with its capital in Damascus. In 680, tensions flared in the Iraqi city of Karbala between the Umayyad Caliph Yazid and Hussein, Ali's son and the third Shi'i Imam. Hussein, badly outnumbered by Yazid's forces, refused to assent to Umayyad rule; he and his followers were subsequently slaughtered by Yazid. Hussein's martyrdom at Karbala was important in transforming Shi'ism from an opposition party to a separate religious sect within Islam. The theme of martyrdom is

⁹ Heinz Halm, *The Shiites: A Short History*, (Markus Wiener: Princeton, 2007), 5. (Translated from German by Allison Brown)

widespread in contemporary Shi'ism, and Hussein's death is commemorated by Shi'is each year during the Islamic month of Muharram, the second holiest month after Ramadan. Much of Hezbollah's rhetoric is structured around these Shi'i themes of martyrdom, sacrifice, and resistance.¹⁰

Within Shi'ism, multiple splits emerged over the identity of the rightful Imam. The "Zaydis" split in a dispute over the Fifth Imam, and the "Isma'ilis" over the Seventh. The Houthis, known for their participation in the Yemeni Civil War (2011-present), adhere to Zaydi, or "Fiver", Shi'ism, while Isma'ili populations exist in contemporary India. The majority of Shi'is today are Twelvers. They believe that the Twelfth Imam, al-Mahdi, is in hiding, or "occultation", and that he will eventually return.¹¹ Most of the Shi'is in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, and the rest of the Arab world are Twelvers. Shi'is disagree on who should lead the Muslim community while their Imam(s) are in occultation. The Iranian Revolution and subsequent Islamic Republic provided a model, which Hezbollah adopted as its founding ideology, for managing Shi'i affairs while al-Mahdi remains in occultation. el Houri explains:

*Khomeini argued that the faithful should not wait for the Imam to manage their lives and society but that a just rule and state could and must be established in the period of absence ... The essential breakthrough in Khomeini's thought was the break with the notion that the Imam – who was unerring and a descendent of the Prophet – is the only legitimate ruler and instead it was deemed sufficient for the ruler to be wise and just.*¹²

French Mandatory Period, 1920-1945

The conclusion of World War I ended 400 years of Ottoman Empire control over the provinces that would become contemporary Lebanon and Syria. The 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, secretly negotiated between Britain and France during the World War I, partitioned the former Ottoman provinces of Greater Syria between themselves, envisioning French rule over modern Lebanon, Syria, and the province of Hatay, annexed by Turkey in 1939. The King-Crane Commission, a public-opinion survey of

¹⁰ Walid el Houri, *The meaning of resistance: Hezbollah's media strategies and the articulation of a people*, (Amsterdam: Rozenberg Publishers, 2012), 88.

¹¹ Halm, *The Shiites*, 29.

¹² el Houri, *The meaning of resistance*, 85-86.

the Arab subjects of the former Ottoman Empire, revealed considerable Arab opposition to both French and British control.¹³ Arab opinion was also overwhelmingly opposed to the detachment of a separate Lebanese state from Greater Syria. Nevertheless, the San Remo conference of April 1920 placed the State of Greater Lebanon, which had been excised from Syria, under French control. This control was to be exercised officially through the Mandate system of the nascent League of Nations.

French decision making with regard its Mandates for Syria and Lebanon was shaped by economic and geopolitical competition with Britain. The French corresponded primarily with Mount Lebanon's Maronite Catholics, a community with whom the French had developed strong cultural and economic linkages. French-British competition over Mount Lebanon and Greater Syria dates to the so-called "events of 1860", a series of conflicts between Mount Lebanon's Maronites, who received sponsorship from the French, and Druze, who received sponsorship from Britain.¹⁴ Following World War I, France's main concern was to gain British acquiescence to French control of Greater Syria. Accordingly, France relinquished claims to Palestine and Mosul, a region of northern Iraq. In return, Britain accepted French control of Greater Syria and gave the French a share in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company.¹⁵

Once France secured control of Greater Syria from Emir Faysal, an Arabian prince who would later become the ruler of Iraq, the French needed to find the best way to control their newly acquired Mandates for Syria and Lebanon. Traboulsi summarizes France's dilemma as such: "which was the better method to dominate the whole of Syria, especially its rebellious Sunni majority?"¹⁶ The boundaries established in 1920 greatly expanded the historically Christian-dominated province of Mount Lebanon, to the objection of many Sunni Muslims and Druze who had hitherto identified as Syrians and now found themselves detached from Greater Syria and incorporated into the separate Lebanese entity.¹⁷

¹³ Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 78.

¹⁴ Ibid., 37.

¹⁵ Ibid., 76

¹⁶ Ibid., 85

¹⁷ Moojan Moman. *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism*. Yale University Press, 1985, 264-265.

Demographically, a 1921 census demonstrated only a slim majority of Christians over Muslims within Greater Lebanon, foreshadowing Lebanon's sectarian challenges as an independent state.¹⁸ The French hoped to design a Christian-dominated state that would ally itself with France and weaken Syria's Sunnis. A state encompassing only the Christian heartland of Mount Lebanon would not be economically viable, but a larger Lebanon, with significant numbers of non-Christians, threatened the desired Christian character of the future state. The latter position ultimately won out, and Lebanon was established as a larger state with significant non-Christian populations.¹⁹

The Shi'is of Lebanon possess a lengthy and rich historical tradition. Though an analysis of this community's entire narrative is beyond the scope of this project, certain aspects of this history are topical and thus deserve mention. By the fourteenth century, Shi'i settlement in South Lebanon led to the Jabal Amil region becoming a leading center of Levantine Shi'i culture and scholarship.²⁰ Following the Ottoman takeover of the region in the early 1500s, Levantine Shi'i Muslims began to feel pressure from the Sunni-led Ottomans, who were engaged in sporadic conflicts with Safavid Iran, which had adopted Twelver Shi'ism as the state religion in the early sixteenth century and had turned to Jabal Amil scholars for assistance in implementing Shi'i doctrines.²¹ This led to migration of some Shi'i scholars from Jabal Amil to Iran, creating linkages between scholars of the two countries that are visible up to the present day.²² Iranian leverage amongst the Shi'a is a consistent narrative within contemporary Levantine politics, with critics of Hezbollah regularly accusing Lebanese Shi'a of serving Iranian interests and undermining regional stability. Iran's influence in Lebanon will be analyzed in later sections and during the forthcoming discussion of the November 2013 bombing of the Iranian embassy in Beirut.

At the time of the formation of Greater Lebanon, the Shi'a were largely ignored. They represented around 17% of the country's population but were largely dissociated from the more

¹⁸ Harris, William. *Lebanon: A History, 600-2011*. Oxford University Press, 2012, 178.

¹⁹ Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 85-86.

²⁰ Harris, *Lebanon*, 84.

²¹ Blanford, Nicholas. *Warriors of God: Inside Hezbollah's Thirty-Year Struggle Against Israel*. Random House, 2011, Chapter 1.

²² Harris, *Lebanon*, 85-86.

economically prosperous Maronites and Sunnis, having long been under the influence of landed elites.²³

For the Shi‘a, one of the early perks of the mandate period was French acquiescence in 1926 to the use of the Ja‘afari school of Islamic jurisprudence within Shi‘i courts, which had been prohibited in the Ottoman period.²⁴ The use of the Ja‘afari school helped unite the Shi‘a of the Bekaa Valley and South Lebanon into the cohesive community that exists today in these two regions of Lebanon and in Beirut’s southern suburbs.²⁵

A second census, administered in 1932, forms the basis for modern Lebanon’s confessionally-based system of political allocation. This census demonstrated an even slimmer Christian majority within Lebanon, one which would soon vanish altogether thanks to the growth of non-Christian Lebanese sectarian communities. Christians, from the Maronite, Eastern Orthodox, Greek Catholic, and other smaller churches, were shown to make up barely over 50% of Lebanon’s population. The three largest confessional communities, Maronite, Sunni, and Shi‘a, measured in at 29%, 23%, and 20%, respectively, demonstrating considerable Muslim population growth since 1921.²⁶ From the beginning, Lebanon’s confessional system heavily privileged the Christians and Sunnis – Lebanon’s dominant communities at the time of the French Mandate – while allocating only nominal power to the Shi‘is. Despite modifications to the political system after the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), the 1932 census still forms the basis of political apportionment in Lebanon, to the ire of those who wish to move beyond an inexact method based on religious communities yet find their efforts countered by those who argue “that agreeing on power-sharing is better than fighting over it in a divided society like Lebanon” and that the current system, in spite of all of its faults, is one of the most participatory and free political systems in the Arab world.²⁷

²³ Ibid., 178.

²⁴ Ibid., 179.

²⁵ Ibid., 180.

²⁶ Ibid., 185.

²⁷ Salem, Paul. Lebanon. In S. Lust (Ed.), *The Middle East*. CQ, 2013, 626.

Independence to Black September, 1945-1970

Nazi Germany's defeat of France in June 1940 began the process of true independence for France's Mandates of Lebanon and Syria. Maronite Bishara al-Khuri was nominated to the presidency on September 21, 1943 and soon after appointed Sunni Riyadh al-Sulh to the premiership. This formation of a successful government reflects what is known as Lebanon's National Pact, a compromise made largely between Maronite and Sunni elites to reflect the Lebanese Republic's sovereignty and independence from Greater Syria, a precondition of the Maronites, while affirming Lebanon's Arab character and freedom from French suzerainty, which helped somewhat in assuaging Sunni concerns regarding the nature of the Lebanese state. These Christian and Sunni elites agreed upon a system in which Lebanon's president would be a Maronite Catholic while the office of the prime minister would go to a Sunni. Other important positions, such as Commander-in-chief of the Lebanese Armed Forces, went to Maronites as well. Largely absent from this equation were the Shi'is, who were allocated the far weaker position of parliamentary speaker.

The shocking defeat of the Palestinians and Arab armies in the First Arab-Israeli War in 1948 led to a huge influx of mainly Sunni Palestinian refugees into Lebanon. These refugees further strained the country's fragile sectarian balance; at this point Muslims almost certainly outnumbered Christians, despite political predominance of the latter thanks to the strong powers of the presidency and a fixed Christian parliamentary majority. The 1948 Arab-Israeli War, in which Lebanon itself played a negligible role, roiled popular sentiments within the Arab world, particularly among Arab nationalism-minded Muslims. Egypt, under President Jamal Abd al-Nasser, led the way in promoting Arab nationalism, and in 1958 even unified with Syria in a short-lived federation. Nasser's rhetoric and funding of Lebanese rebels precipitated a brief civil war in 1958 between Nasserites and supporters of Lebanese President Camille Chamoun. Under the anti-communist Eisenhower Doctrine, Chamoun petitioned for the landing of US troops in Lebanon, with Eisenhower eventually obliging in hopes of demonstrating his commitment to pro-American actors in the region.

Most Shi'a remained under the influence of the traditional *zu'ama*, or landed elites, during this period, though many joined secular, left-wing organizations like the Lebanese Communist Party. According to Norton, "given the absence of a well-developed movement or party that could appeal broadly to the community, it is hardly surprising that the Shi'a lent their numbers to a wide variety of political organizations."²⁸

Fu'ad Shihab replaced Chamoun as president in September 1958, proving overall to be a less divisive figure than his predecessor. Some major legacies of this period, particularly from the perspective of the Lebanese Shi'a, were state-led infrastructure development programs and educational improvements in South Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley which, coupled with continued economic stagnation within Shi'i areas, dislodged Shi'i peasants from the traditional influence of agrarian families and led them to migrate to urban areas, Beirut in particular.^{29 30} Shihab's policies were by no means the only forces to impact Lebanon's Shi'a in these years. In 1957, Musa al-Sadr, an Iranian-born Shi'i cleric originally from a Jabal Amil family, became the Shi'i mufti of Tyre, a post of considerable religious authority. al-Sadr's actions went beyond preaching, as he worked to empower downtrodden Shi'a and occasionally members of other confessional groups through social activism, highlighting the negligence of the central Lebanese state towards these peripheral groups.

In June 1967, Israel launched a preemptive strike against Egypt following escalating tensions between the two states which destroyed much of Egypt's large air force. With support from Arab countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa, Jordan and Syria invaded Israel soon after. In response, Israel seized Syria's Golan Heights, the Jordanian-administered West Bank and East Jerusalem, the Egyptian-administered Gaza Strip, and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. Like the 1948 War, Lebanon's participation was negligible.³¹ The war, known in Arabic as the *Naksah*, or Setback, humiliated

²⁸ Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a*, 38

²⁹ Harris, 216.

³⁰ Blanford, *Warriors of God*, Chapter 1.

³¹ Michael Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 237. During the war, two Lebanese jets strafed Israeli positions, though no Lebanese ground troops entered the war. Had

Palestinians and the citizens of Arab states alike. The 1967 War marks a shift in the Israel-Arab conflict as Palestinian factions organized under the umbrella Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) assumed the primary responsibilities of confronting Israel from the vanquished Arab states.

Operating from Jordanian territory, Palestinian groups' power and authority grew. On September 6th, 1970, members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) hijacked and landed multiple airplanes at Jordan's Dawson Field. Sensing that he was losing control of his country, Jordan's King Hussein declared martial law and fought against Palestinian units in a series of events known as Black September. After a crisis in which the Jordanian and Syrian governments almost fought a full-scale war against one another, the PLO was expelled from Jordan and shifted its operational bases to South Lebanon. South Lebanon, over which the Lebanese state already had very limited authority, was a promising location for Palestinians looking to establish a "state within a state" from which they could conduct raids against Israel.

This influx of armed Palestinians to South Lebanon further strained Lebanon's fragile demographic structure, adding to Lebanese Christians' fears of losing their positions of control over the country. Lebanese Shi'is, finding themselves caught between two reckless sides, often absorbed the brunt of the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians. The Lebanese Army was hardly able to assert control over more developed areas like Beirut and Mount Lebanon, and it had essentially no control over the South. Palestinian raids against Israel placed South Lebanon on a collision course with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), as the Lebanese state lacked the ability to contain the Palestinian guerillas.

In South Lebanon, al-Sadr and his followers felt tension between supporting the Palestinians and their cause and protecting the Lebanese Shi'a, who were especially affected by Israeli retaliations. Shi'is could rely on neither the PLO nor the Lebanese government for protection, and the response of al-Sadr's Movement of the Deprived was to establish a paramilitary wing, the Lebanese Resistance Battalions, to defend South Lebanon from Israeli attacks and to keep pace with the militias of other confessional

the Lebanese made a more forceful incursion, the Israelis would have likely invaded Lebanon in addition to Jordan, Egypt, and Syria.

groups.³² This group, known as the Amal Movement, would be a major source of personnel for Hezbollah following the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Under the leadership of Nabih Berri, Lebanon's Parliamentary Speaker, Amal remains a leading Shi'i actor.

The 1960s and early 1970s saw considerable economic change among the Shi'a, including a marked shift from agricultural employment to low-paying service sector positions in Beirut.³³ Many moved to areas populated by Palestinian refugees. Violence throughout these years in South Lebanon led Shi'is to seek refuge in Beirut, and, vice-versa, violence in Beirut led Shi'is to seek refuge in the South.³⁴ Norton states that "The Shi'a, like their compatriots, were caught in the throes of change. They were being torn away from familiar settings and associations, and as this was happening the strains on the traditional political system increased sharply. In short, by the 1960s, ever larger numbers of Shi'is became potential recruits for political movements (mobilization agents) that could translate their inchoate politicization into political action."³⁵

The Early Years of the Lebanese Civil War and the Emergence of Hezbollah, 1970-1982

Hezbollah was technically founded in 1978, though the organization did not truly take shape until 1982. Hezbollah's formation is linked to three distinct political developments. First, the disintegration of the Lebanese state into competing sectarian alliances mobilized Lebanon's Shi'is, permanently extinguished the already waning political influence of landed Shi'i families, and created a vacuum in which non-state actors like Hezbollah and Amal could incubate. Lebanon's disintegration also led to the Syrian occupation of the country, which profoundly affected Hezbollah's formation and continues to shape the group's identity today. Second, dissident Iranian political activity in Lebanon, the subsequent Iranian Revolution (1978-1979), and the support of Iranian *Pasdaran* (Revolutionary Guard) units profoundly shaped Hezbollah's character and ideology. Finally, Israeli invasions and occupations of

³² Harris, 226.

³³ Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a*, 37.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 37.

Lebanon, particularly Israel's 1982 Operation Peace for Galilee, destabilized Syria's position in Lebanon and created space for Iranian advisors.

Musa al-Sadr founded the Movement of the Deprived – a political and social organization – in 1973, vowing “to struggle relentlessly until the security needs and the social grievances of the deprived – in practice the Shi‘a – were satisfactorily addressed by the government.”³⁶ al-Sadr's castigation of the Lebanese state for its irresponsibility, his self-portrayal as a pseudo-savior figure, and his later calls for Shi'i militarization helped set the stage for Hezbollah's future ideological framework.³⁷ al-Sadr highlighted long-standing themes of Shi'i hardship and neglect, important in drawing Shi'is from secular to confessionally-based movements. According to Shaery-Eisenlohr, “The image of the disadvantaged (*mahrum*) Lebanese Shi'ites thus does not refer solely to their experience with Maronite (and now Sunni) Lebanon but carries with it, according to this national narrative, the memory of centuries of oppression for which Lebanese Shi'ites now seek justice.”³⁸

The influx of Palestinian militants to South Lebanon in 1970 agitated many of the local Shi'is. Musa al-Sadr, along with Mustafa Chamran, an anti-Shah Iranian who arrived in Lebanon in 1971 and joined the Amal Movement, gradually came into conflict with the Palestinian leadership over the conduct of Fatah guerrillas in South Lebanon. Another faction, one closely affiliated with the exiled cleric Ruhollah Khomeini, opposed the Amal Movement and their Iranian affiliates. The Khomeini-linked group, whose members would eventually help establish and train Hezbollah, accused al-Sadr and Chamran of abandoning the Palestinians and of collaborating with the Shah's regime.³⁹

The Lebanese Civil War began on April 13th, 1975 following escalatory violence between Lebanese Christian, Muslim, Druze, and Palestinian factions, and Beirut soon became partitioned between areas of Christian and Muslim control. Given the complexity of the Lebanese Civil War, this project will

³⁶ Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a*, 47.

³⁷ Blanford, *Warriors of God*, Chapter 1.

³⁸ Shaery-Eisenlohr, Roschanack. *Shi'ite Lebanon*. Columbia University Press, 2008, 21.

³⁹ Shaery-Eisenlohr, *Shi'ite Lebanon*, 204-205.

forgo a comprehensive analysis of the conflict and instead focus on the emergence and development of Hezbollah.

As the Lebanese Army splintered along confessional lines in early 1976, South Lebanon became fully integrated into the conflict, which had hitherto been centered around Beirut and Mount Lebanon.⁴⁰ Hafez al-Assad's Syria intervened in Lebanon in 1976 on behalf of Lebanon's Maronites in an effort to stem the tide of the Lebanese National Movement (LNM), a coalition of Sunni, Druze, and Palestinian groups led by Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt. al-Assad, wary of what the disintegration of Lebanon may have meant for Syria, unleashed the Syrian army to take control over much of the country's territory.⁴¹ al-Sadr cautiously aligned himself with al-Assad, viewing the Syrian intervention as a check on Palestinian power in South Lebanon.⁴² The al-Assads of Syria, members of the minority Alawi sect, have generally kept close relations with Lebanese Shi'a, empowering the community to stymie Israeli and Sunni attempts to assert hegemony over Lebanon. al-Sadr permanently disappeared under suspicious circumstances in Libya in 1978. His likely death, combined with the rise of revolutionary Shi'ism during 1978-1979 Iranian Revolution, led to increased support for the Amal Movement. Amal partisans clashed with Palestinian guerillas, dislodging PLO control in the South.⁴³

By 1976, Syrian support for Amal against the LNM gave grist to the Khomeini-affiliated factions which argued that Amal's cooperation with the Syrians – who were allegedly in Lebanon to save the Maronites – equated to complete abandonment of the Palestinians.⁴⁴ Shaery-Eisenlohr, while discussing Amal's relations with the revolutionary Iranian government, argues that “three interrelated issues – the Iranian government's lack of interest in finding Sadr [after his disappearance in 1978], the question of sending Iranian volunteers to South Lebanon, and Amal's resistance to becoming subordinate to the concept of guardianship of the jurisprudent – *vilayat-i faqih* in Persian or *wilayat al-faqih* in Arabic –

⁴⁰ Blanford, *Warriors of God*, Chapter 1.

⁴¹ McHugo, John. *Syria: A Recent History*. Saqi Books, 2015, 163-164.

⁴² Norton, Augustus Richard. *Hezbollah: A Short History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007, 37.

⁴³ Ibid., 39-40.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 212.

alarmed Amal members about the future of their relations with the Iranian government as well as Iranian plans for Shi'ites in Lebanon.”⁴⁵

In response to a 1978 Palestinian raid – which has come to be known as the Coastal Road massacre – in which guerillas sailed from Lebanon to Israel, Israel invaded Lebanon in the so-called Operation Litani. The Israeli invasion succeeded in pushing the PLO north of the Litani River, and upon retreating the Israelis left their conquered positions under the control of their Lebanese Christian ally Saad Haddad's South Lebanon Army (SLA). Israel invaded Lebanon again in 1982, this time conducting a far more extensive and complex operation than Operation Litani. In Operation Peace for Galilee, Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Defense Minister Ariel Sharon desired and intended for nothing less than a reshaping of the entire Middle East. Israeli historian Avi Shlaim describes Sharon's “big plan” in the following way:

*The first aim of Sharon's plan was to destroy the PLO's military infrastructure in Lebanon and to undermine it as a political organization. The second aim was to establish a new political order in Lebanon by helping Israel's Maronite friends, headed by Bashir Gemayel, to form a government that would proceed to sign a peace treaty with Israel. For this to be possible, it was necessary, third, to expel the Syrian forces from Lebanon or at least to weaken seriously the Syrian presence there. In Sharon's big plan, the war in Lebanon was intended to transform the situation not only in Lebanon but in the whole Middle East. The destruction of the PLO would break the backbone of Palestinian nationalism and facilitate the absorption of the West Bank into Greater Israel. The resulting influx of Palestinians from Lebanon and the West Bank into Jordan would eventually sweep away the Hashemite monarchy and transform the East Bank into a Palestinian state.*⁴⁶

The Israeli invasion began on June 6th, 1982, three days after Israeli's ambassador to London, Shlomo Argov, was shot by the Palestinian Abu Nidal group, a rival of the PLO. Nevertheless, the Israeli government used the incident as a pretext for Operation Galilee, which began on June 6th. Israel, though

⁴⁵ Ibid., 217.

⁴⁶ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, 406-407.

encountering stiff resistance at times, surrounded Beirut and forced most of the PLO out of Lebanon by September 1982. But as their occupation wore on, Israel encountered considerable Lebanese resistance and grave difficulties in implementing Sharon's audacious plan.

Hezbollah's Formation

Though welcomed by some resentful Lebanese who had grown tired of the Palestinian presence, the 1982 Israeli invasion energized many young Lebanese Shi'is, inspired in part by the Iranian Revolution, to band together in networks of resistance against the Israelis. The unravelling of Israel's "big plan" further complicated the Lebanese situation and facilitated the rise of Hezbollah. Per Israel's plans, Bashir al-Gemayel, a Maronite warlord and the leader of the Katai'b/Phalange party, was elected President of Lebanon in August 1982. In September, prior to taking office as president, he was assassinated by a member of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP). Soon after al-Gemayel's assassination, Christian militias entered Beirut's Sabra neighborhood and Shatila refugee camp and massacred their primarily Palestinian and Shi'i residents. Israeli troops were accused of allowing the massacres to take place and received worldwide condemnation.

Prior to the Iranian Revolution and the subsequent war between Iran and Iraq (1980-1988), the Iraqi city of Najaf had been the favored destination for Lebanese Shi'i religious scholars. As Saddam Hussein's Iraq became an inhospitable location for Shi'i scholars, "Young Lebanese Shi'i clerics such as Subhi al-Tufayli and Abbas al-Mussawi, who later played important leadership roles in Hezbollah's early days, trickled back into Lebanon from Iraq ... The returnees from Iraq brought with them revolutionary fervor and the commitment to change their societies."⁴⁷ Sayyid Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah urged these returnees – many of whom had been members of the Iraqi Da'wa Party – to join Amal and add to the movement an Islamic and revolutionary character.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Norton, *Hezbollah*, 47.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Iran played the main role in organizing and supporting the young Lebanese Shi'is who would form Hezbollah, but Syria also had a hand in this process. "For Iran, the creation of Hezbollah was a realization of the self-styled 'Islamic revolution.' From Syria's standpoint, the new militant Shi'i party was a fortuitous instrument for preserving Syrian interests..."⁴⁹ Immediately after Israel's 1982 invasion, al-Tufayli and Raghieb Harb, another young Shi'i, were in Tehran coordinating Iranian support for a Shi'i resistance movement.⁵⁰ Syrian forces in Lebanon were ravaged in clashes with the IDF, and Hafiz al-Assad signed an agreement with Iran which allowed the Islamic Republic to place Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) units in the Bekaa Valley to train a Lebanese resistance force. "Gradually, shepherded by the IRGC, a loose coalition began to emerge in the Bekaa consisting of the Amal defectors, Mussawi's Islamic Amal, members of the Lebanese Union of Muslim Students, and adherents of the Lebanese Dawa party, as well as numerous tiny institutes and study groups that comprised the radical Shia milieu in Lebanon."⁵¹

In 1983, Hezbollah's influence spread from the Bekaa Valley to South Beirut and then to South Lebanon.⁵² Much of the Hezbollah's notoriety, particularly in America and Europe, was gained through the group's roles in suicide bombings and hostage takings of Westerners before the group was officially proclaimed in 1985. Hezbollah was almost certainly responsible for bombings of the Israel Defense Forces headquarters in Tyre, the U.S. embassy in Beirut, and the attacks against French paratroopers and American Marines in Lebanon, which led to the withdrawal of the international peacekeeping force (MNF) from the country.

Hezbollah emerged in opposition to Amal's hesitance to endorse Iran's specific religious framework and to consent to the presence of Iranian volunteers in Lebanon following Israel's 1982 invasion. This point is especially crucial for the purposes of this project, as it demonstrates the primacy of armed opposition to Israel and adherence to Iran's worldview in the group's formation. Hezbollah came

⁴⁹ Ibid., 50.

⁵⁰ Blanford, *Warriors of God*, Chapter 2.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

to represent a transnational approach to Shi'ism, with the group serving as an important component of a religious network centered around Iran. Amal, less overtly linked to Iran, adhered to a "Lebanese" or "Arab" version of Shi'ism, defined in opposition to the system of guardianship of the jurispudent. Though today Hezbollah and Amal are parliamentary allies, the groups still represent competing visions of Lebanese Shi'ism. It is crucial, especially in the context of the current Syrian conflict, to avoid viewing the Lebanese Shi'a as a monolithic bloc with fixed political loyalties.

Hezbollah's Early Ideological Framework

In 1985, on the one-year anniversary of the death of Sheikh Raghīb Harb, a Shi'i resistance leader, Hezbollah released its first manifesto, an "Open Letter Addressed by Hizb Allah to the Downtrodden in Lebanon and in the World."⁵³ This letter articulates Hezbollah's enemies, allies, goals, and world view, and is therefore an incredibly forthright and important primary source. Nevertheless, trying to understand Hezbollah through its manifesto alone is like trying to understand contemporary Islam by only reading the Qur'an. Hezbollah is a complex organization that has developed considerably in the years since its founding, and though the 1985 manifesto is a central document to its identity, it is only the starting point to understanding the group. In fact, a goal of this project is to counter the tendency to essentialize Hezbollah based on its early ideology or on the fact that it at times has engaged in terrorist activity.

Hezbollah's letter is centered around the group's confrontation with Israel and the United States – the main enemies of oppressed peoples throughout the world. The letter states that both East and West, capitalism and socialism, have failed the downtrodden peoples – the Third World, for lack of a better term. Instead of seeking support from either of these two oppressive blocs, the world's downtrodden should take a third route: Islam – specifically the revolutionary Islam recently articulated by Ayatollah Khomeini and the other leaders of the Iranian Revolution. Hezbollah's early leaders, by pledging explicit

⁵³ Appendix B. *Nass al-risala al-maftuha allati wajjahā hizb allah ila al-mustad'afin fi lubnan wa al-'alam* in Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a*, 1987.

allegiance to Ayatollah Khomeini and to Iran's Shi'i Islamic government, positioned themselves as undertaking Khomeini's call for Muslims to "turn away from the tyrannical government of the oppressors and destroy their house of oppression..."⁵⁴

The letter explicitly lays out Hezbollah's determination to confront and destroy the State of Israel. While this determination should be taken literally, Hezbollah never realistically envisioned a situation in which Lebanese fighters alone would cross the border and liberate Israel. Instead, this section of the letter is a call to all Muslims to join with Hezbollah and the Palestinians in a broad confrontation with Israel. The letter refers to Israel as "the American spearhead in our Islamic world,"⁵⁵ implying that Muslims should focus their attention on extricating Israel from the region before confronting the West in earnest. The letter claims that Hezbollah, by forcing the Israelis to retreat from its positions in central Lebanon (which will be discussed further in the next section), discredited the myth that Israel's military is invincible. This myth having been discredited, Hezbollah issues the world's Muslims a call to arms to liberate the Palestinians.

Hezbollah uses the letter to outline its goals as an organization, which include ousting foreign forces from Lebanon, delivering justice to right-wing Lebanese Phalangists, and securing through Lebanese self-determination a system of Islamic governance in the country. The manifesto is tolerant towards average Lebanese Christians and respectful of their beliefs, though it certainly advocates the adoption of an Islamic state by all Lebanese. The manifesto decries Lebanon's governmental structure and confessional system as severely deficient, calling for its complete abolishment and replacement. Though Hezbollah's active participation in Lebanese politics has in practice nullified their desire to radically change Lebanon's political system, the group maintains a firm rhetorical commitment to opposing Israel.

Syrian and Israeli Occupations of Lebanon, 1982-2005

⁵⁴ Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, Tehran: The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works (International Affairs Division), 1970.

⁵⁵ Hezbollah's Open Letter in Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a*, Appendix B, page 179.

Hezbollah units skirmished with Amal and Syrian forces through the 1980s, and Hezbollah continued to put pressure on the Israeli occupation forces through guerilla warfare and bombings of Israeli targets. Hezbollah's played a major role in forcing Israel's February 1985 withdrawal from most of Lebanon to a small "security zone" in the South. As shown in the group's 1985 Open Letter, Hezbollah seized on the propaganda opportunity to brand itself as the first Arab actor to ever force an Israeli retreat. From 1985 until Israel's complete withdrawal in 2000, Hezbollah concentrated its attacks against Israeli and South Lebanon Army positions within this security zone. For the most part, Hezbollah could choose the time and place for its attacks. Accordingly, Hezbollah's tactics and battlefield prowess developed considerably during this period, while Iranian and Syrian material support helped to transform the group from a shadowy militia to a robust fighting force.

Since they play an important role in the group's recruitment and popularity among Shi'is, Hezbollah's social programs deserve mention. In 1982, the group founded its first of six hospitals in Baalbek. Hezbollah's main hospital, the Rasul al-Azam Hospital in South Beirut, has a walk-in clinic.⁵⁶ Hezbollah's *Mu'assasat al-Shahid* provides support to the families of "martyred" Hezbollah members and its *Mu'assasat al-Jarha* assists wounded fighters. Support from these two organizations takes the form of "housing, education, clothing, health services, and other social services... cash allowances, medical care, and rehabilitation services."⁵⁷ Hezbollah also provides welfare to poor families and orphans. The *Jihad al-Bina* (Holy Struggle for Construction) is Hezbollah's construction and public works wing, which since 1985 has been responsible for rebuilding Lebanon after Israeli raids.⁵⁸

Hezbollah's social service components have sometimes been discounted by Western and Israeli observers as mechanisms for Hezbollah to woo supporters for its destructive activities via Iranian cash.⁵⁹ This criticism may be warranted, but one should recall that Hezbollah's success as a social service

⁵⁶ Melani Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism: Welfare and Sectarianism in Lebanon*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 153.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 152.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 152-153.

⁵⁹ See Benjamin Weinthal, "Europe Has a Serious Hezbollah Problem," *The Tower*, May 2013 for a well-articulated critique of Hezbollah and its multiple identities. <http://www.thetower.org/article/europe-has-a-serious-hezbollah-problem/>

provider is due in large part to the neglect of the Shi'a by the Lebanese state and the repeated destruction of their cities and resources by Israeli raids. The group also imbues its social service provision with religious motifs: "In the post-war period, the social welfare institutions of Hezbollah developed far more extensively, in part thanks to generous funding from Iran but also as a result of donations from individuals, investments in private businesses, and revenue from religious taxes such as *zakat* and *khums*."⁶⁰

As the Lebanese Civil War wound down, Iran and Syria's "Damascus Agreement" brought fighting between Hezbollah and Amal to a close. On a broader scale, the various Lebanese factions met in Ta'if, Saudi Arabia, composing reforms to the Lebanese confessional system and essentially concluding the 15-year long war. Hezbollah, unlike the other armed militias, managed to avoid disarmament based on the logic that its presence as an armed resistance movement remained necessary to evict the Israelis, who still occupied Lebanon through their security zone. Following Ta'if, Syria also retained its hegemony over Lebanon, exercising overt military dominance while also extending its control into much of Lebanon's intelligence services. Despite rocky relations between Hezbollah and Syria in the past, continued Syrian control meant continued dominance for Hezbollah as the al-Assad regime became an important sponsor of the group, providing weapons, financial assistance, and diplomatic backing.

No official "winner" emerged from the Lebanese Civil War – much of the country was devastated and each sectarian community sustained tremendous losses. But the Ta'if process did modify communal allocations of political power in substantial ways. Specifically, the Sunni premiership and to a lesser degree the Shi'i position of parliamentary speaker were strengthened at the expense of the Maronite presidency, and parliamentary seat allocations were made equal between Muslims and Christians.⁶¹

In February 1992, Israeli forces assassinated Hezbollah Secretary-General Abbas al-Mussawi in South Lebanon, leading to Hassan Nasrallah's election to the post he still holds to this day. al-Mussawi's

⁶⁰ Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism*, 154.

⁶¹ Ibid., 61. Parity in parliamentary seat allocations between Christians and Muslims still favors the former, as the combined population of Christian sects makes up less than half of Lebanon's official population. Factoring in Palestinian and Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the vast majority of whom are Sunnis, the percentage of Christians drops even further.

assassination coincided with Lebanon's first parliamentary elections in 20 years; party hardliners vigorously opposed Hezbollah's participation in Lebanese politics, but others within the organization, including Nasrallah, supported a Hezbollah parliamentary slate. The latter faction ultimately won out, with Hezbollah candidates performing quite well. This election inaugurated a new era for Hezbollah, which had clearly evolved into something far more complex than a cabal of Iran-backed Shi'i militants.⁶² Around the time of its decision to enter parliamentary politics, Hezbollah backed away from its goal of establishing an Islamic state in Lebanon based on the Iranian model.⁶³ Though significant, this decision reflects the group's acceptance of post-civil war political realities rather than a drastic shift in its ideology. Even after entering Lebanese politics, Hezbollah maintained its Islamic character and commitment to revolutionary Shi'i principles.

Despite Hezbollah's newly acquired role in Lebanese politics and its prolific social welfare networks, the group remained committed above all else to challenging Israel's continued occupation of South Lebanon. Hezbollah fighters became notorious for fiercely challenging the occupation forces and their Lebanese proxies, provoking severe Israeli retaliations during the 1993 Operation Accountability and the 1996 Operation Grapes of Wrath, both of which devastated Lebanese infrastructure throughout the country. Though Hezbollah was by no means universally popular amongst Lebanese during this period, the group was often viewed favorably across Lebanon's sectarian spectrum as a legitimate and necessary resistance force, protecting Lebanon from Israel.

In early 2000, Syria and Israel engaged in peace and territorial negotiations. These negotiations showed surprising promise, but the process ultimately failed in March 2003. Blanford writes, "if a peace deal had been concluded in the spring of 2000, Israel, Lebanon, and Syria probably would have enjoyed calm and stability along their respective borders for the past decade. Lebanon would have followed Syria's lead and signed a deal with Israel, Hezbollah would have been disarmed under Syrian fiat, and

⁶² Blanford, *Warriors of God*, Chapter 3.

⁶³ Cammett, *Compassionate Communalism*, 72.

quiet would have prevailed along Israel's northern border."⁶⁴ But no peace deal was concluded, and Israel withdrew without any border negotiations with Syria or Lebanon.

Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000, largely caused by Hezbollah pressure, was received with jubilation throughout Lebanon, though it did pose significant issues for the group. To many Lebanese, the end of the Israeli occupation nullified Hezbollah's *raison d'être*; debates over the disarmament of Hezbollah continue to rage within Lebanon to the present day. Hezbollah and Syria used a small patch of Israeli-occupied disputed land on the Lebanese-Syrian border, the Sheba'a Farms, as a justification for Hezbollah to maintain its weapons and not simply become a Lebanese political and social organization like the Amal Movement. Based on cartographical evidence, the Sheba'a Farms is, despite Lebanese and Syrian protestations, part of the Golan Heights – Syrian territory which was occupied by Israel in 1967 and annexed in 1981. Hezbollah and its Lebanese and Syrian allies claimed that this area was part of Lebanon, since Lebanese civilians had been the primary occupants of the Farms before they were deserted. Thus, Hezbollah's argument goes, since Israel has not withdrawn from the Sheba'a Farms, it has not completely withdrawn from Lebanese territory; this means that Hezbollah's status as a national resistance movement, as enshrined in the Ta'if Accords, remains valid.⁶⁵

Despite sporadic clashes between Israel and Hezbollah, the period from 2000 to 2005 was a relatively quiet one. This semblance of calm came crashing down when Rafik al-Hariri, a former Lebanese Prime Minister and billionaire businessman, was assassinated in February 2005. Many Lebanese erupted in protest, immediately alleging a Syrian hand in the assassination. The veracity of these claims aside, the assassination started Lebanon down a road of political turmoil on which it remains. Rival demonstrations supporting and opposing Syria's occupation of Lebanon occurred on March 8th and March 14th, respectively. The competing political blocs formed in the aftermath of Hariri's assassination bear the names of these dates: the March 8 Alliance, to which Hezbollah, Amal, and the Maronite Free Patriotic Movement currently belong, and the March 14 Alliance, consisting of various Christian and

⁶⁴ Blanford, *Warriors of God*, Chapter 6.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Muslim groups, including the Sunni Future Movement, led by Rafik's son and current Lebanese Prime Minister, Sa'ad.

Political Turmoil, 2006 Lebanon War, and 2008 Lebanese Political Crisis

Syrian expulsion from Lebanon led to a spate of political assassinations, suspected by some to be the work of Syrian intelligence agencies, further inflaming divisions between bitter Lebanese.⁶⁶ Among those killed was Gibran Tueni, the prominent editor of the newspaper *al-Nahar* and an outspoken critic of Hezbollah and Syrian interference in Lebanon.⁶⁷ On July 12th, 2006, a cross-border kidnapping raid conducted by Hezbollah led to a month long war with Israel and the destruction of targets across South Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs, known as *al-Dahieh*. At first fielding international censure, including from some Arab states, Hezbollah's popularity skyrocketed as Israeli bombardments and ground offensives wore on and the organization proved tougher than expected.⁶⁸

In addition to suffering the destruction of valuable territory and infrastructure, Hezbollah faced renewed calls for its disarmament, with Lebanese critics lambasting the group's bellicosity in provoking Israel. The United Nations, through Security Council Resolution 1701, added international pressure on Hezbollah by calling for the end of private armies in Lebanon. This hostility aside, Iran and Syria assisted Hezbollah tremendously following the 2006 War by rearming the group and working to rebuild civilian and military fixtures.⁶⁹ Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who assumed power in 2000, has proven far friendlier to Hezbollah than his father. Bashar has used Syrian territory as a waystation for powerful Iranian weapons en route to Lebanon and the Syrian regime has provided plenty of arms to Hezbollah itself.⁷⁰ Since 2006, Hezbollah has wisely avoided another major confrontation with Israel; the opening of

⁶⁶ Blanford, Nicholas. *Killing Mr. Lebanon: The Assassination of Rafik Hariri and its Impact on the Middle East*. I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2009, 176.

⁶⁷ Norton, 145.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 154.

⁶⁹ Harris, 271.

⁷⁰ Ranstorp, Magnus. Hizbullah in the Syrian conflict. In M. Felsch and M. Wählich, *Lebanon and the Arab Uprisings: In the eye of the hurricane*. Routledge, 2016, 35.

a second front as the group is preoccupied in Syria could prove devastating, and Hezbollah's capability of striking Israeli cities with Iranian-made missiles serves as a powerful deterrent to Israeli action.

In the years since the 2006 War, Hezbollah's popularity in Lebanon and throughout the Arab world has decreased significantly, due to strategic decisions made by the organization entailing direct confrontation with fellow Arabs and Muslims and also due to the rising sectarian conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran and their respective allies and proxies. Hezbollah is an important component of the so-called Axis of Resistance, a loose grouping that includes Iran, Iraq, Syria, and various sub-state actors, including Iraqi militias under the Popular Mobilization Forces. Political fallout from the killing of Rafik al-Hariri continues, as multiple Hezbollah members were indicted in 2010 by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) for roles in his assassination.⁷¹

In 2008, following an extended political stalemate, the government of Fouad Siniora announced plans to launch an inquiry into Hezbollah's communications network and dismiss a key party ally. Days later, Hezbollah militants stormed West Beirut, skirmishing with Sunni March 14th partisans and driving them from their neighborhoods. One Hezbollah member joked to journalist Nicholas Blanford that "The people here went to sleep last night with Omar and woke up this morning with Ali," referring respectively to common Sunni and Shi'i names.⁷²

Hezbollah's 2008 confrontations with fellow Lebanese Muslims are turning points in the group's evolution. To some, these confrontations demonstrate Hezbollah's lust for control and willingness to sabotage Lebanon's political stability to gain power. In fact, a leading figure in the Abdullah Azzam Brigades, al-Qaeda's Lebanese branch and one of Hezbollah's major adversaries during the Syrian Civil War, specifically pointed to these confrontations in his condemnation of Hezbollah for its participation in the Syrian conflict.⁷³ Domestic opponents of Hezbollah labeled the takeover as an "armed coup" and

⁷¹ Ibid., 32.

⁷² Blanford, *Warriors of God*, Chapter 11.

⁷³ Zelin, Aaron. Jihadism in Lebanon. In M. Felsch and M. Wählisch, *Lebanon and the Arab Uprisings: In the eye of the hurricane*. Routledge, 2016, 56.

criticized the group's connections to Iran and Syria.⁷⁴ Hezbollah's actions tarnish the group's reputation as a "loyal opposition" party. Wiegand argues that Hezbollah's entry into Lebanese politics in 1992 symbolized a conscious choice by the group to not use its weapons against fellow Lebanese but only for resistance purposes. Incidents like this make it far more difficult for Hezbollah to argue that its weapons are only used for resistance purposes.⁷⁵

Hezbollah's 2009 Manifesto⁷⁶

Hezbollah released an updated manifesto in 2009. Though the document provides some new information, it sheds light upon Hezbollah's ideological transformation primarily due to what it *omits*. Like Hezbollah's 1985 Manifesto, the 2009 version is divided into various sections, including the United States, Iran, Lebanese politics, and Israel.

The beginning of the manifesto discusses American policy towards the Middle East, focusing on its struggles in Iraq and Afghanistan. It condemns the United States for conflating legitimate resistance movements, such as Hezbollah or Iraqi opposition groups, with terrorists to justify its expansionist wars in the Middle East. In an argument which appears to be a precursor for Hezbollah's conspiratorial allegations during the Syrian Civil War, the document accuses the United States and Israel of "creating and embedding sedition and division of all types, especially sectarian ones among Muslims, to create limitless internal civil clashes."

The document briefly discusses Lebanese politics, but, in stark contrast to the 1985 Manifesto, is ambiguous concerning Hezbollah's vision for Lebanon's political system. Iran is discussed very favorably, but the document only makes a passing remark to the group's allegiance to Ayatollah Khamenei and makes no calls for the establishment of an Islamic state in Lebanon. The document frames Hezbollah primarily as a partner, rather than a follower, of Iran.

⁷⁴ Robert Worth and Nada Bakri, "Hezbollah Seizes Swath of Beirut from U.S.-Backed Lebanon Government," *The New York Times*, 10 May 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/10/world/middleeast/10lebanon.html>

⁷⁵ Krista Wiegand, *Bombs and Ballots: Governance by Islamist Terrorist and Guerilla Groups*, (London: Routledge, 2010), 100.

⁷⁶ "The New Hezbollah Manifesto," November 2009. <http://www.lebanonrenaissance.org/assets/Uploads/15-The-New-Hezbollah-Manifesto-Nov09.pdf>

Finally, the document mentions Israel. The language is as caustic as ever, though it seems to shift most of the responsibility for annihilating Israel to the Palestinians – Hezbollah would play a supportive, but not primary, role. The document reiterates Hezbollah’s opposition to any negotiated settlements with Israel and highlights both the latent dangers that Israel poses and the need to reclaim Israeli-occupied Lebanese territory.

This document underscores the many changes that Hezbollah has undergone through its history. The most important shift, one which becomes quite apparent during the subsequent analysis of Hezbollah’s Syrian conflict speeches, is the group’s institutionalization within Lebanon’s political milieu. Hezbollah uses its political power to stymie hostile proposals, and its more recent linkages with Christians make Hezbollah’s support of the complete abolishment of the confessional system quite unlikely.

The Syrian Civil War

The 2011 outbreak of conflict in Syria, which pitted the al-Assad regime against a largely Sunni opposition, occurred during an already tempestuous period within Lebanon. As the March 14th and March 8th alliances generally aligned themselves ideologically with the Syrian rebels and the regime, respectively, the country was plunged into a period of even greater sectarian tension.

The Syrian conflict began not as a sectarian war but in the form of popular demonstrations against the regime of Bashar al-Assad in the Syrian city of Der‘aa, near the Jordanian border. On March 30th, about a month after the first demonstrations began, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad addressed his citizens on the growing violence in Syria and alleged that these demonstrations were part of a foreign conspiracy “in order to undermine Syria’s stability.”⁷⁷ al-Assad’s words failed to placate most Syrians, and demonstrations against the regime became larger, more frequent, and more violent. By the summer of 2011, the Free Syrian Army emerged as a major opposition group to the al-Assad regime. The regime’s

⁷⁷ McHugo, *Syria*, 222-223.

troubles extended to the international scene: an opposition government, the Syrian National Council, was established in Turkey and in November 2011 Syria was suspended from the Arab league.

In addition to using brutal police and military tactics to attempt to crush the opposition, al-Assad made a strategic decision to release numerous jihadists from Syria's prisons, including al-Qaeda member Abu Mus'ab al-Suri.⁷⁸ Hayder al-Khoei states that al-Assad "cracked down on pro-reform activists and developed a narrative that would appeal to the West: Syria was not under threat from popular protests, but terrorism. However, by doing so, he turned the narrative into a self-fulfilling prophecy."⁷⁹ By deliberately pushing jihadists to the forefront of the Syrian opposition, al-Assad calculated that he and his allies like Iran and Hezbollah would be better able to justify their campaign against Syrian opposition groups. As will be shown, Hezbollah has profited considerably from extreme nature of some components of the Syrian opposition.

The Syrian city of Raqqa fell to Syrian opposition groups, including al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra, in March 2013.⁸⁰ Control over the city was contested by various opposition groups from March 2013 until early 2014, when the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) solidified their control over the city. Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIL separated from one another in mid-2013.⁸¹ Even before ISIL secured the city, reports emerged of gruesome violence against Christian, Shi'i, and Alawi citizens and their religious sites.⁸² The often brutal takeovers of Raqqa and other cities and villages by Islamist⁸³ groups

⁷⁸ Ibid., 227-228

⁷⁹ Hayder al-Khoei, *Syria, Iraq and the Struggle for Power: Intertwined Futures*. (London: Chatham House, 2016) <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/syria-iraq-and-struggle-power-intertwined-futures>

⁸⁰ "Syria rebels capture northern Raqqa city," *Al-Jazeera*, March 4, 2013.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/03/201334151942410812.html>

⁸¹ William McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015), page 131.

⁸² Tim Whewell, "Syrian activists flee abuse in al-Qaeda-run Raqqa," *BBC*, November 13, 2013.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-24926584>

⁸³ In the context of this paper, the label "Islamist" applies to people and groups that wish to establish, in some form or another, an Islamic state in which *shari'a*, Islamic religious law, forms the basis of society. The desired nature of Islamist rule often differs considerably depending on the actor. For example, ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra both wish to implement Islamic rule, but ISIL has taken a more forceful route to implementation whereas Jabhat al-Nusra has been more conscious of alienating potential "citizens" of their Islamic state.

soon before Hezbollah's May 2013 campaign to retake the Syrian city of al-Qusayr helped Hezbollah frame and justify its entrance into the Syrian theater.

Sunni Islamists in Lebanon and Syria

In his speeches, Nasrallah routinely refers to Hezbollah's Syrian opponents as *takfiris*. *Takfir* in Arabic is a verbal noun meaning religious excommunication – the process of declaring someone a *kafir* (unbeliever). Thus, a person who performs *takfir* is known as a *takfiri*. The word has a lengthy history in Islam, and has been used to refer to non-Muslims by birth, converts to Islam, and to members of different sects of Islam; the most prominent historical situation, which some argue has its origins in the writings of the Medieval scholar Ibn Taymiyya, has been Sunnis performing *takfir* on Shi'is, Alawis, and other minority sects.

Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi was a Jordanian Sunni Muslim who led al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) from the American invasion in 2003 until his death in 2006. al-Zarqawi's strategy differed significantly from that al-Qaeda central's leaders, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, in that while the latter wished to build popular Muslim support for an eventual Islamic state, al-Zarqawi wanted to establish one immediately with only his small coterie of followers. In the context of the Iraqi insurgency, al-Zarqawi "explained his strategy for winning over the Sunnis, defeating the transitional [Iraqi] government, and driving the infidels from Iraq: Provoke the Shi'a."⁸⁴ al-Zarqawi possessed a vicious hatred for Shi'is, one which is manifested in the current Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, AQI's successor. McCants states that, in contrast to bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, "al-Zarqawi wanted to first overthrow local autocrats and eliminate the 'traitorous' Shi'a, whom he believed were collaborating with the Americans to subjugate the Sunnis. His strategy was to ignite a sectarian civil war."⁸⁵

al-Zarqawi and his successors have succeeded in many of his aims, and the current ISIL group is directly linked to al-Zarqawi's ideology. Nasrallah takes full advantage of this caustic rhetoric in

⁸⁴ McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, 11.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

justifying Hezbollah's participation in the Syrian Civil War. In adopting a strategy employed by Bashar al-Assad as well as Iranian and Russian leaders, Nasrallah frames all Syrian opposition groups as adhering to this narrow sectarian viewpoint. But these extreme views towards Shi'is have never been held by more than a small minority of Sunnis. Even bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, the perpetrators of the September 11th, 2001 attacks, found them extreme and possibly counterproductive. *Takfiris* are routinely condemned not only by Shi'is and Western observers, but by moderate Sunni Muslims.

In general, Hezbollah's communications can be viewed as addressing three distinct regional populations: 1) Lebanese and Syrian supporters of Hezbollah (largely Shi'is and Alawis), 2) fence-sitters – Christians in particular, though this group also includes Sunnis, Shi'is, and Druze, and 3) antagonists – those who are completely opposed to the al-Assad regime and Hezbollah's support of it. Hezbollah seeks to reassure its supporters, win over the fence-sitters, and minimize damage to its ideology among the antagonists. Regional Sunni issues will be discussed now, while Christian politics with regard to the Syrian Civil War will be discussed in the following section.

Sunni extremist groups have long used Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps, which most often simply are sprawling slums, to organize operations and recruit disaffected Sunni youths. Tripoli's Nahr al-Bared and Sidon's Ain al-Hilweh are two particularly prominent camps in which Sunni militants have clashed with Hezbollah and the Lebanese army. In the latter camp, Sunni cleric Ahmad al-Assir, who developed a substantial Sunni following and has since been imprisoned, emerged as a major critic of Hezbollah's involvement in Syria in particular and of Iran's influence in the Levant more generally. Through 2012, al-Assir's rhetoric became more radical, and in April 2013, just as Hezbollah was preparing for its offensive in al-Qusayr and its formal announcement of military participation in the Syrian conflict, the cleric issued a fatwa calling on Syrian Muslims to violently confront Hezbollah. al-Assir, whose supporters clashed with the Lebanese army in June 2013, has chastised the army as a foreign tool that works alongside Hezbollah at the behest of Iran: "To all our partisans, we are being attacked by the Lebanese army, which is Iranian and Shiite ... I call on all partisans to block roads and all honorable

Sunni and non-Sunni [soldiers] to leave the army.”⁸⁶ ⁸⁷ Zelin argues that al-Assir’s main impact with regard to Hezbollah was to normalize criticism of the group among Lebanese Sunnis.⁸⁸

The Abdullah Azzam Brigades (AAB), al-Qaeda’s Lebanese branch, is another important Sunni actor which has clashed militarily and rhetorically with Hezbollah. An important strategy for Hezbollah’s Sunni antagonists in general, and for AAB in particular, has been to argue that Hezbollah’s interests are aligned with Iran, not with Lebanese Shi‘is themselves. As an example of this strategy, AAB’s leader Majid bin Muhammad al-Majid stated, “your leaders are concerned with ruling and dominance, and your concern is security, subsistence, dignity and justice ... they are risking your security and subsistence to save the reign of Al-Assad and save their throne in Lebanon.”⁸⁹ AAB’s communications have also attempted to show that Hezbollah has, since 2006, failed to confront Israel in any meaningful way. In June 2013, soon after Hezbollah’s announcement of participation in the Syrian Civil War, an AAB statement challenged Hezbollah “to fire one bullet at occupied Palestine and claim responsibility.”⁹⁰ AAB accuses Hezbollah of permitting Israeli incursions into Lebanese airspace and tolerating the presence of Israeli spies within Lebanon so as not to open a second front while the group is preoccupied in the Syrian theater.⁹¹ Finally, Jabhat al-Nusra, a former al-Qaeda affiliate which rebranded in 2016, adopting the name Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, has confronted Hezbollah in both Lebanon and Syria and has undertaken a concerted effort to delegitimize the Lebanese army as an Iranian puppet and to encourage Sunnis to defect from its ranks.⁹²

Outside of Lebanon, Hezbollah has also fielded substantial criticism from ISIL, which operates primarily in Iraq and Syria. William McCants states that ISIL has used Islamic history and prophecy,

⁸⁶ Aaron Zelin, *Jihadism in Lebanon*. In M. Felsch and M. Wählisch, *Lebanon and the Arab Uprisings: In the eye of the hurricane*. (London: Routledge, 2016), 53.

⁸⁷ Dana Moukhallati, “Breaking down Ahmad al-Assir: the man behind the beard,” *Al Arabiya*, June 25, 2013. <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/profiles/2013/06/25/Breaking-down-Ahmad-al-Assir-the-man-behind-the-beard.html>

⁸⁸ Zelin, *Jihadism in Lebanon*, 53.

⁸⁹ Majid bin Mohammad al-Majid, “A message to the Shia of Lebanon.” Accessed on April 6, 2017. <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/mc481jid-bin-mue1b8a5ammad-al-mc481jid-22message-to-lebanons-shc4abah22-en.pdf>

⁹⁰ Levitt, *Hezbollah*, 384.

⁹¹ Zelin, *Jihadism in Lebanon*, 55-56.

⁹² *Ibid*, 55-56.

much of which the group has misinterpreted, to describe the conflict between Hezbollah and Sunnis (or, as some Sunnis refer to it, Hezb al-Shaytan – the Party of Satan) in eschatological terms.⁹³ This misinterpretation notwithstanding, Syrian jihadists have succeeded in portraying Hezbollah and its supporters as infidels.

The discourse of these Sunni extremists directly shapes Hezbollah's own discourse towards its Shi'i partisans and towards Christians and other minority groups, as well. As will be seen, Nasrallah's primary concerns are to portray Hezbollah as a defender of the Lebanese and a bulwark against Israel's aggressive regional schemes. Nasrallah's statements are often made in direct response to the issues raised within the Sunni discourse, especially concerning Hezbollah's destabilization of Lebanon due to its subservience to Iran and its dereliction in its duty to confront Israel.

Lebanese Christians

Between 1900 and 2010, Middle Eastern Christians moved from 10% to 5% of the region's population, a trend reinforced both by emigration and by high non-Christian birthrates.⁹⁴ Lebanese Christians' fears of being overrun by the region's Muslims, always prevalent, have risen in recent years both due to the rise in Sunni extremism in the Middle East and the influx of Syrian refugees – the vast majority of whom are Sunnis – into Lebanon. These fears present Hezbollah with the opportunity to win over divided Christians to its camp, forming a sort of bulwark against Sunni political and demographic forces. Politically, the Lebanese Christian community has been split since 2006 between the March 8th-allied Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), led by such individuals as Gibran Bassil and Michel Aoun, the latter of whom became President of Lebanon in October 2016, and the March 14th-allied Lebanese Forces and Katai'b Party. Bassil, for instance, has been very critical of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, seeing them

⁹³ McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, 109-111

⁹⁴ Phillip Connor and Conrad Hackett, *Middle East's Christian population in flux as Pope Francis visits Holy Land*. (Pew Research Center, 2014) <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/05/19/middle-east-christian-population-in-flux-as-pope-francis-visits-holy-land/>

as a threat to Lebanon's Christians in particular.⁹⁵ Statements by Lebanese Christians concerning Syrian refugees draw implicit comparisons to the role of Palestinian refugees in precipitating Lebanon's civil war.

Hezbollah's concerted outreach efforts to Christians began prior to the Syrian Civil War, though this rhetoric has escalated during the war and become a constant theme of Nasrallah's speeches. In a 2008 speech during the month of Ashura, Nasrallah contrasted Arab Christians with Christians in Western countries.

*What this extremist Christian current is committing must not be attributed by anyone in the Arab and Muslim world to Christians as Christians ... Jesus Christ will not be a supporter of Israel, the big oil companies, nor the big arms manufacturers or the oppressors, dictators and unjust rulers in the world, rather he will be a great ally of the oppressed, the downtrodden, and those suffering in the world*⁹⁶

A 2009 survey shows that only 18% of Lebanese Christians expressed positive opinions of Hezbollah.⁹⁷ This survey, conducted a year after Hezbollah's controversial takeover of West Beirut and before the Syrian Civil War began provides a useful baseline upon which to analyze the impact of the Syrian Civil War on Christians' support for Hezbollah. A possible example of this impact is seen in a 2012 survey which reported that 94% of Lebanese Sunnis and 61% of Lebanese Christians opposed an Iranian nuclear program, while 92% of Sunnis and 57% of Christians opposed then Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.⁹⁸ It is improper to correlate attitudes felt towards Hezbollah with those felt towards Iran, but this survey does demonstrate that although considerable Christian animosity exists towards Iran, this animosity is nowhere near that felt by Lebanon's Sunnis. Finally, both polls were

⁹⁵ Felsch, Maximilian, *Christian Nationalism in Lebanon*. In M. Felsch and M. Wählich, *Lebanon and the Arab Uprisings: In the eye of the hurricane*. (London: Routledge, 2016), 77.

⁹⁶ el Houri, *The meaning of resistance*, 87.

⁹⁷ *Mixed Views of Hamas and Hezbollah in Largely Muslim Nations: Little Enthusiasm for Many Muslim Leaders*. (Pew Research Center, 2010) <http://www.pewglobal.org/2010/02/04/mixed-views-of-hamas-and-hezbollah-in-largely-muslim-nations/>

⁹⁸ *A Global "No" To a Nuclear-Armed Iran*. (Pew Research Center, 2012) <http://www.pewglobal.org/2012/05/18/a-global-no-to-a-nuclear-armed-iran/>

reported prior to the emergence of ISIL – and its horrendous atrocities against minority groups – onto the international stage in 2014, which may have further shifted Christian public opinion towards Hezbollah and Iran.

The alliance between Hezbollah and Lebanese Christian groups is one of convenience, especially since the long-term interests of the two communities with regard to Lebanon's political structure allegedly are in opposition. Hezbollah, if its past ideological pronouncements are to be taken at face value, favors the abolition of Lebanon's confessional system. Christians, on the other hand, depend on their privileged positions within this system. On both the local and national levels, Christian activists work to stymie changes to Lebanon's confessional system, voting, and citizenship laws, prevent the acquisition of Christian-owned land by non-Christians, and discourage Christian emigration from Lebanon.⁹⁹

Any long-term differences between Christians and Hezbollah aside, it is clear that each side sees benefits in uniting as a common front against Lebanese Sunnis and Syrian refugees. For Hezbollah's part, the opportunity to add allies in a period of profound unpopularity for the group in the Sunni world far outweighs Hezbollah's ideological differences with the Christians over Lebanon's ideal structure of governance. Hezbollah's public outreach to Christians is thus an important strategic maneuver by the group, one which becomes ever more apparent as Hezbollah confronts the fallout of its decision to intervene in Syria.

⁹⁹ Felsch, *Christian Nationalism in Lebanon*, 74-76.

PART 2

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Underpinnings of Hezbollah’s Communications

The speeches and interviews that follow were given by Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah’s Secretary General. Nasrallah is revered by Lebanon’s Shi‘is and, particularly since the 2006 Lebanon War, has become a regional celebrity. Certain aspects of Nasrallah’s identity are worth explaining, since they shed light upon his charisma and impact. First, Nasrallah, unlike many prominent Lebanese political figures, comes from a poor, relatively unknown family. This humble status gives Nasrallah considerable clout and legitimacy among Shi‘is, many of whom have similar backgrounds.¹⁰⁰ Second, Nasrallah’s son Hadi was killed fighting against Israel in 1997. Nasrallah’s stoic acceptance of his son’s “martyrdom” produced great admiration among general Hezbollah supporters, many of whom are acquainted with or related to fallen Hezbollah members. The death of his son also gives him legitimacy in justifying Hezbollah’s costly military operations.¹⁰¹ Finally, by mixing Colloquial Lebanese Arabic with Modern Standard Arabic, Nasrallah uses an oratory style, which el Hourri argues originated with former Egyptian President Jamal Abd al-Nasser, to reach a wide Arab audience while still appearing authentically Lebanese.¹⁰²

Hezbollah’s identity is centered around resistance – to Israel, America, and other opportunistic powers which look to gain at the expense of Arabs and Muslims. el Hourri, drawing on Laclau,¹⁰³ argues that Nasrallah embodies the idea of “resistance”: “we can understand the role of Nasrallah as a charismatic leader in the consolidation of the unified identity of Hezbollah and its supporters and in constituting this identity by *representing* it.”¹⁰⁴ Essentially, Nasrallah connects his discourse with the theme of resistance – “the speeches establish an emotional connection and bond that joins the leader to his followers and joins his followers together in a shared emotional experience.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ el Hourri, *The meaning of resistance*, 77.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 79.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ernesto Laclau, *On populist reason*, (London: Verso, 2007), 159.

¹⁰⁴ el Hourri, *The meaning of resistance*, 80.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

In this framework, Nasrallah's discourse and charisma are intimately linked to resistance against Israel. Philip Smith defines charisma in the following way:

*A moral bond of duty linking followers to leaders. This bond, however, should not be understood in micro terms as the product of personality and group process, but rather in a cultural way as the product of symbolic structures. It is founded on the collective sentiment that the fate of society with regard to 'ultimate concerns' is dependent upon the actions, powers and moral worth of the leader.*¹⁰⁶

Nasrallah then is connected to his constituents by articulating Hezbollah's defense of Lebanese Shi'is against Israel. el Hourri argues that "the narrative presented in the speeches builds on a clear moral argument. The absolute evil represented by Israel ... is opposed to an absolute good represented by resistance and the righteous struggle of Hezbollah and other militant groups notably in Palestine."¹⁰⁷ A fundamental theme of Hezbollah's identity, as articulated by Nasrallah, is the group's resistance against Israel. How has Hezbollah attempted to reconcile its historically defensive and resistance-based narratives with its offensive campaign, conducted against other Muslims, in Syria? This is one of the fundamental issues of Hezbollah's speeches in the forthcoming analysis section.

Even within the short timeframe covered by this project (May 2013-March 2014), a relatively small number of Hezbollah communications were analyzed. The main theme that connects the selected speeches is their demonstration of Hezbollah's methods for responding to crises – both anticipated crises, like fallout from Hezbollah's intervention in Syria, and those like suicide attacks which had already occurred. These events provide useful insights into Hezbollah's broader rhetorical strategies, since their political and social significances demand that Hezbollah expend extra effort in explaining and contextualizing them. Given the limited number of speeches that can fit within the scope of this project, responses to crises generally provide the most detailed and substantive information.

¹⁰⁶ Philip Smith, "Culture and Charisma: Outline of a Theory," *Acta Sociologica* 43, January 1, 2000, 101-111.

¹⁰⁷ el Hourri, *The meaning of resistance*, 82.

There are also less prosaic reasons for choosing crisis responses. Smith and el Hourri argue that “a charismatic leader appears when the group is facing threats and challenges to its very existence. In this context she is the one who is capable of articulating a narrative of salvation, providing re-assurance, explanation or a solution to the perceived threat.”¹⁰⁸ Through Hezbollah’s existence, these “threats and challenges” can be interpreted as both specific events – Operations Accountability and Grapes of Wrath and the 2006 War, for example – and also as the general threat Israel and the West pose for Arabs and Muslims. Within this framework of charisma, a crucial question for Nasrallah and Hezbollah is whether the group can continue to articulate a “threat” emanating from the Syrian Civil War. Jihadist groups like the Abdullah Azzam Brigades have argued that Hezbollah’s leadership, by working alongside Iran in Syria, endangers Lebanese Shi’is. This sentiment does not appear to be prevalent among Lebanese Shi’is, but if the idea took hold that Hezbollah creates more problems and risk than it remedies, the group would be in serious danger.

Chronological Examination of Events

*Major Attacks Against Hezbollah Targets and Strongholds, 2013-2014*¹⁰⁹

- **July 9th, 2013** – Bombing of Beirut’s Bi’r al-Abed neighborhood – 53 wounded – attack claimed by the 313 Brigade¹¹⁰
- **July 16th, 2013** – Attack against a Hezbollah convoy in the Bekaa Valley – 1 dead, three wounded – attack claimed by the Abdullah Azzam Brigades (AAB)¹¹¹
- **August 15th, 2013** – Bombing of Beirut’s Ruwais neighborhood – 27 killed, 336 wounded – attack claimed by the Battalions of Aisha Um al-Mu’mineen

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 84.

¹⁰⁹ Daniel Byman and Bilal Saab, *Hezbollah in a Time of Transition*. (Atlantic Council, Brookings Institution, 2014)
<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Hezbollah-in-a-Time-of-Transition.pdf>

¹¹⁰ Global Terrorism Database, Incident 201307090005, July 9, 2013.
<https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/IncidentSummary.aspx?gtdid=201307090005>

¹¹¹ Global Terrorism Database, Incident 201307160015, July 16, 2013.
<https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/IncidentSummary.aspx?gtdid=201307160015>

- **November 19th, 2013** – Bombing of the Iranian Embassy in Beirut’s Bi’r Hassan neighborhood – 26 killed, 152 injured – attack claimed by the Abdullah Azzam Brigades^{112 113}
- **December 4th, 2013** – Assassination of Hezbollah commander Hassan al-Laqqis in Beirut – 1 killed – attack claimed by Liwa Ahrar al-Sunna Baalbek
- **January 2nd, 2014** – Bombing of Beirut’s Haret Hreik neighborhood – 6 killed, 66 wounded – attacker unknown
- **January 21st, 2014** – Bombing of Beirut’s Haret Hreik neighborhood – 4 killed, 46 wounded – attack claimed by Jabhat al-Nusra
- **February 19th, 2014** – Bombing of the Iranian Cultural Center in Beirut’s Bi’r Hassan neighborhood – 11 killed, 128 wounded – attack claimed by the Abdullah Azzam Brigades^{114 115}
- **September 20th, 2014** – Bombing of Hezbollah checkpoint in Khraybeh – 3 killed

¹¹² Global Terrorism Database, Incident 201311190001, November 19, 2013.
<https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/IncidentSummary.aspx?gtdid=201311190001>

¹¹³ Global Terrorism Database, Incident 201311190002, November 19, 2013.
<https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/IncidentSummary.aspx?gtdid=201311190002>

¹¹⁴ Global Terrorism Database, Incident 201402190028, February 19, 2014.
<https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/IncidentSummary.aspx?gtdid=201402190028>

¹¹⁵ Global Terrorism Database, Incident 201402190029, February 19, 2014.
<https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/IncidentSummary.aspx?gtdid=201402190029>

Chapter 3 – Hezbollah in Syria

The Battle for al-Qusayr and Hezbollah's Declaration of Involvement in the Syrian War

On May 19th, 2013, Hezbollah began preparations for a full-scale assault on the rebel-controlled Syrian city of al-Qusayr. Hezbollah has militarily, logistically, and rhetorically supported the al-Assad regime since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War in March 2011; an August 2012 report from the U.S. Treasury Department states that Hezbollah “has provided training, advice and extensive logistical support to the Government of Syria’s increasingly ruthless efforts to fight against the opposition.”¹¹⁶ Despite this continued assistance, the al-Qusayr operation marks the first incident in which Hezbollah ground forces engaged in close-quarters, urban conflict against Syrian opposition forces. Furthermore, the campaign marks the first instance of Hezbollah publicly announcing its belligerency in the Syrian conflict in aid of the al-Assad Regime.

Hezbollah fighters in the battle for al-Qusayr numbered around 1,200 special forces troops, and Hezbollah fighters, alongside Syrian troops, successfully retook the town from rebel (mostly Jabhat al-Nusra affiliated groups) control. al-Qusayr is crucial for both the Syrian regime and Hezbollah as it links Damascus to Syria’s coastal regions and lies close to the Lebanese border.

According to journalist Nicholas Blanford, the fighting that occurred in the battle for al-Qusayr was the heaviest seen by Hezbollah forces since the July 2006 Hezbollah-Israel War. In its wars against Israel, Hezbollah has historically relied upon guerrilla warfare to exploit “the IDF’s Achilles’ heel: the Israeli public’s aversion to casualties.” In an ironic role-reversal, Hezbollah was forced to adopt counterinsurgency warfare in the battle for al-Qusayr, which led to heavy losses for the group.

Hezbollah's Participation in Syria – April 30th, 2013¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ “Treasury Targets Hizballah for Supporting the Assad Regime.” U.S. Department of the Treasury Press Release. August 10, 2012.

¹¹⁷ Note: dates refer to the day that the speech or interview was given.

An April 30, 2013 speech by Nasrallah marks the outset of Hezbollah's narrative construction in anticipation of its escalatory moves in al-Qusayr. Nasrallah outlines in this pivotal speech, which lasts around 70 minutes, many of the key concepts that he would expound upon in future communications regarding the group's participation in the Syrian conflict.¹¹⁸ He makes two main points in his speech: 1) the Syrian opposition (Nasrallah largely treats the many opposition factions as one collective unit) is rooted in *takfirist* ideology and is linked to Israel and to Western powers that want to see Syria completely destroyed so that it can no longer wield influence as a regional power (particularly as it concerns the Palestinian struggle), and 2) Hezbollah is a benevolent power that seeks to counter this surreptitious plot designed to destabilize the region.

As mentioned previously, Hezbollah first and foremost seeks to portray itself as a defender of the Lebanese and broader Arab community against Israeli and Western aggression, and Nasrallah's speech seeks to connect the anti-Israeli sentiments of his Lebanese constituents with the far more controversial situation in Syria. This focus is reflected in the first few minutes of his speech, in which Nasrallah airily discusses Israeli media reports before asserting that, despite the complex regional situation, Hezbollah maintains a position of strength with regard to Israel.¹¹⁹

This highlighting of Hezbollah's continued ability to confront Israel is significant. As Nasrallah pivots to discuss Syria at around the seventeen minute mark, he implies that the enemies the group faces in Syria are closely linked to Israel. Describing the Syrian crisis as the riskiest and most dangerous issue for Arabs in the region, Nasrallah states that the goals of the Syrian opposition are to remove Syria from the Axis of Resistance, to neutralize the regime as a player in the Israel-Palestine conflict, and to completely destroy the Syrian people and their society, thus serving the interests of those who want to see Syria's regional influence diminished.¹²⁰

Nasrallah employs multiple important concepts here. First, he alludes to Hafez and Bashar al-Assad's sponsorship of Palestinian resistance groups through the years. Though it is easily argued that

¹¹⁸ ElectronicResistance. "Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah Speech - 30/4/13 (ENGLISH SUBS)." Youtube. 7 May 2013.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 11:10.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 26:00.

Syrian support of these groups has been primarily self-serving, Nasrallah nonetheless frames Hezbollah's support of the Syrian regime as a form of resistance against Israel.¹²¹ Next, he argues that the Syrian rebels' goal is to completely destroy the country, implying that any opposition to the Syrian regime on humanitarian grounds is merely a pretext. He suggests that the opposition groups are controlled by Sunni Gulf states, Western powers, and Israel, all of which desire a weak Syrian state. Furthermore, he does not distinguish between the various groups, with their manifold ideologies and visions, that operate within Syria. This is likely a maneuver by Nasrallah to stoke fears within his domestic constituency by exaggerating the unity and radical views of the Syrian opposition, implying that a new regime in Syria would by default threaten and oppose the Shi'a. Hostility and neglect feature prominently in the collective consciousness of Lebanese Shi'is, and Nasrallah looks to evoke images of a tyranny of the majority situation should the Syrian regime fall.¹²²

These concerns about tyranny link directly to the concept of *takfir*, or religious excommunication. Nasrallah routinely refers to Sunni opposition groups in Syria as *takfiris*, implying that they are intolerant of Muslims adherent to any doctrines besides their own interpretations of Sunni Islam, thus posing a grave threat to Shi'is and other minority groups. Nasrallah, by denouncing *takfiri* groups, attempts to portray Hezbollah as patriotic, defending not only the Shi'a but the entire Lebanese system of coexistence between confessional groups.

In justifying Hezbollah's participation in the conflict, Nasrallah discusses the threat that the *takfiri* groups present to Shi'i shrines located within Syria. Referring in particular to the Sayyidah Zeinab Mosque, which is located south of Damascus and contains the tomb of the daughter of Ali, the first Shi'i Imam, Nasrallah cites internet communications from opposition groups located near the Sayyidah Zeinab Mosque threatening the shrine's destruction. This, he claims, is indicative of what would become the widespread reality if *takfiris* were to take power.¹²³ Nasrallah thus adds a tangible religious dimension to his narrative of protecting minority groups from *takfiri* tyranny. Finally, Nasrallah discusses threatened

¹²¹ Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 117-132.

¹²² Moman, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 264-266.

¹²³ ElectronicResistance, 55:15.

Lebanese located in villages across the Syrian border, and the need for Hezbollah to protect them due to the shortcomings of the Lebanese state.¹²⁴ These points, which mirror in a sense the rhetoric of Musa al-Sadr during the 1960s, help to frame Hezbollah as an indispensable savior, struggling to protect the oppressed and threatened due to lofty moral considerations.

Though Nasrallah speaks directly in sectarian terms when discussing the role of *takfiri* groups, he makes multiple attempts towards the end of his speech to reduce religious tensions both in Syria and between the various communities in Lebanon. In discussing the Sayyidah Zeinab Mosque, Nasrallah points out that these and other important Shi'i shrines, including the Imam Hussein Mosque in the Iraqi city of Karbala, have for centuries been maintained and defended by Sunnis. Thus, Nasrallah argues, the problem in Syria is with *takfiri* groups, not Sunni Muslims in general. Despite this overture, Nasrallah intentionally implies that the Syrian opposition in its entirety is afflicted by the *takfir* ideology, thereby legitimating Hezbollah's violence against an opposition he portrays as broadly disregarding the lives of non-Sunnis.¹²⁵ Finally, Nasrallah addresses his fellow Lebanese, urging them to understand that, despite Hezbollah's actions in Syria, the group is firmly opposed to any conflict within Lebanon, regardless of differing views towards the Syrian situation.¹²⁶ Nasrallah, surely anticipating that Hezbollah's Syria campaign will bring violent repercussions against his constituents regardless of his statements, appeals for Lebanese stability in spite of Hezbollah's clear violation of the June 2012 Ba'abda declaration regarding Lebanese neutrality towards the Syrian Civil War.¹²⁷

Hezbollah presents a transnational vision of Shi'ism rooted in resistance to Israel and support for the downtrodden. The group's participation in a transnational network means that its own survival is dependent upon the stability of the other actors within this network. Hezbollah depends upon the al-Assad regime, though its support of the regime comes at a high cost. In a sense, Nasrallah uses this speech to present Hezbollah's case to Lebanese who feel that the group's linkages to Iran and the al-Assad regime

¹²⁴ Ibid., 51:30.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 59:15.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 1:06:00.

¹²⁷ Ranstorp, 41.

produce more harm than good and that Amal, less overtly linked to foreign sponsors, is a safer option. Nasrallah presents this case by artfully adapting the current Syrian situation to Hezbollah's ideological framework. Nasrallah argues that the only way to defend the region against Israeli aggression is through the preservation of the Axis of Resistance. This, combined with his portrayal of the Syrian opposition as Israeli operatives, links Hezbollah's current actions to its anti-Israel identity. Nasrallah also focuses on Hezbollah's identity as a defender of the oppressed by citing the group's assistance for threatened Lebanese villages and more generally by portraying Hezbollah as a defender of the Lebanese confessional system.

The Campaign for al-Qusayr, Part One – May 9th, 2013 ^{128 129}

Nasrallah's May 9th, 2013 address is similar in length to the April 30th address, and he begins by commemorating the 25th anniversary of the founding of the pro-Hezbollah al-Nour radio station for around 20 minutes. al-Nour, along with Hezbollah's television station al-Manar (founded in 1991), is the cornerstone of Hezbollah's powerful media division. Hezbollah uses its media network to disseminate its propaganda and counter criticism. Nasrallah commends al-Nour for having served as "part of the resistance" since its founding, continuing to give the truth, and choosing not to "invent or fabricate", even while waging psychological warfare on behalf of the resistance.

Following his discussion of al-Nour, Nasrallah moves into a discussion of recent "Israeli aggression on Damascus", referring to the Rif Dimashq airstrikes that took place only a few days before Nasrallah's address on May 3rd and May 5th. The first Israeli strike targeted Iranian missiles at an arms warehouse at the Damascus International Airport that were possibly destined for Hezbollah.¹³⁰ The unforeseen Israeli strikes actually contributed to Nasrallah's narrative of an Israeli plot to weaken the

¹²⁸ Shabbir Hassanally, "Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah(HA) – Speech – May 9, 2013 – 25th Anniversary al-Nour Radio – English," YouTube, May 9, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MxWKTOKW5s>

¹²⁹ "Text of Nasrallah's May 9 speech," *NOW*, May 9, 2013. <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/hezbollah-leader-sayyed-hassan-nasrallah-speaks-live>

¹³⁰ Anne Barnard, Michael Gordon, and Jodi Rudoren, "Israel Targeted Iranian Missiles in Syria Attack," *New York Times*, May 4, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/05/world/middleeast/israel-syria.html?_r=0

resistance and destabilize the region. “Israelis know that the source of strength of resistance in Palestine and Lebanon is Syria and Iran. It wants to remove Syria in an effort to strengthen its position. Israel is showing Syria that sending weapons to the resistance means that war will in turn be waged on Syria.” Nasrallah also chastises other Arab leaders for giving concessions to Israel, abandoning the Palestinian cause, and emboldening the Israelis by showing nothing but silence in the face of Israeli aggression against the Palestinians. He condemns these Arab leaders for viewing the Palestinian cause as a burden, as opposed to a righteous struggle, and for giving even more concessions to Israel and America after the Arab Spring than they had before, despite the great investments of hope that the Palestinians placed in the Arab Spring for stronger Arab positions towards Israel and towards helping the Palestinians achieve a true homeland.

Continuing his discussion of Israel, Nasrallah argues that the events in Syria are helping the Israelis by weakening al-Assad – he portrays al-Assad as the only legitimate state-backer of the Palestinians and as a crucial part of the resistance, and mentions that al-Assad’s response to the airstrikes was a statement that he would continue to supply Hezbollah. Thereby, Nasrallah shows that the al-Assad regime is a positive force for both Hezbollah and the Palestinians. Nasrallah states that Hezbollah is willing and able to receive “qualitative weapons” (probably referring to longer-range Iranian Fateh-110 missiles, the same type that were likely destroyed in the Israeli airstrike), even if they will disrupt the regional balance, in order to protect Lebanon and its people. Nasrallah then states that Hezbollah morally and militarily supports a popular Syrian resistance to liberate the occupied Golan Heights territory from Israel.

Nasrallah declares at around 52 minutes that he will explicitly bring together two issues, which serves as the culmination of his speech. The first issue regards the Palestinians, and Nasrallah calls on “those who want Muslim and Christian sanctuaries to remain under their rightful owners... those who want to fulfill the rights and aspirations of the Palestinians” to see that these wishes cannot be fulfilled by the “Arab League or the UN”, but that the only one that can fulfill them is the resistance: those who have supported the Palestinians from the beginning and who will continue to support them. Given that al-Assad

is part of the resistance, Nasrallah's second point is that the Arabs must take serious efforts to come to a political settlement in Syria if they wish to prevent its falling into the hands of "the Americans, the Israelis, and the Takfiris". Nasrallah impassionedly states, "This is the battle of Palestine. This is the battle of al-Quds (*Jerusalem* in Arabic). This is the battle of al-Aqsa Mosque." He then asks to stop "the conspiracy", encouraging the Arabs to come to a peace deal in an effort to keep the resistance intact, and highlighting that the longer they wait, the more Israel gains.

The Campaign for al-Qusayr, Part Two – May 25th, 2013¹³¹

In Nasrallah's "words on Eid al-Muqawama", he declares with the most forthrightness to date Hezbollah's direct involvement in Syria; this speech also contains considerable content on Hezbollah's positions regarding the Syrian conflict. Nasrallah, in typical fashion, begins with a discussion of Israel, honoring the 13th anniversary of the Day of Resistance, when Israel ended its occupation of Southern Lebanon in 2000. Nasrallah mentions two dangers facing Lebanon and Hezbollah, the first being Israel, and the second being the "changes taking place in Syria".

In discussing Israel, Nasrallah states that the international community no longer condemns Israel, even when Israel threatens Lebanon every day by mobilizing its troops on the Israel-Lebanon border, by attacking Syria, and of course by subjugating the Palestinians. Building off of this issue, Nasrallah moves into a discussion of the weakness of the Lebanese state, especially its lack of preparedness in facing the Israeli threat. Nasrallah, in reference to the Cedar Revolution, states that prior to 2005, Lebanon was able to rely on Syria, whereas after the Revolution, Lebanon failed to build its strength, and the Lebanese state still does not deal with Israel as an enemy. Nasrallah uses his discussion of the weaknesses of the Lebanese state to underscore the need for Hezbollah to remain armed and active in the region, implying that it is the only force that can successfully defend Lebanon from Israel's aggression.

¹³¹ Shabbir Hassanally, "Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah(HA) – Speech – Saturday, May 25, 2013 – Eid Muqawamah wat-Tahrir," YouTube, May 25, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHHnYwr2044&t=1607s>

The remainder of Nasrallah's speech is dedicated to discussing the Syrian situation. Nasrallah begins by renewing his call to his enemies to spare Lebanon from any clash over Syria: "We disagree in Syria. You fight in Syria; we fight in Syria. Then let's fight there." This is an overture directed towards Syrian opposition groups, which Nasrallah correctly anticipates will attempt terrorist attacks against Hezbollah population centers in Lebanon.

Nasrallah states that Hezbollah has had a clear stance towards the Syrian conflict since the beginning: popular calls for reform are righteous, but the [al-Assad] regime also has positive characteristics, especially its support for Hezbollah and for the Palestinian cause. Accordingly, Hezbollah has sought to initiate political dialogue from the start. Nasrallah then argues that the reason that the opposition has not also pressed for political dialogue is that al-Qaeda and other *takfiri* groups became embroiled in the US-Israel axis. The goal of these groups is not, according to Nasrallah, to negotiate a settlement that will address the legitimate grievances of the Syrian people, but rather is to eliminate the al-Assad regime, and by extension weaken the entire Axis of Resistance, by any means possible. Nasrallah claims that although one part of the Syrian opposition is motivated by legitimate desires for political reform, the CIA, the Pentagon, and other foreign intelligence services support the other part. The latter group is acting on orders from the Americans and the West to destabilize the region, and is not concerned with reaching a political settlement. Nasrallah states, "The greatest power and the overwhelming current which dominates over the political forces controlling over the field is the *takfiri* group". He also states that several Arab and regional states fund the *takfiris*, and that "this story is not anymore, a people revolting against a regime ... it is not that of reforms anymore". Nasrallah mentions in this portion explicitly and for the first time that Hezbollah intervened in Syria "only some months ago" (i.e., before the al-Qusayr campaign).

Next, Nasrallah moves to discuss the specific dangers from Syria, stating, "We consider that the takeover of these groups on Syria, or on a number of Syrian provinces, especially those bordering Lebanon, and not only on Shi'i or Hezbollah provinces... poses grave danger to Lebanon, the resistance, and (our) common existence". Nasrallah directs attention to the fact that Hezbollah is not motivated by

sectarian concerns, such as protecting only Shi‘i Muslims, and he mentions his support for Shi‘is, Sunni, Alawi, Druze, and Christian populations, all of whom face danger from the *takfiri* groups. Nasrallah paints Hezbollah as the antithesis of the *takfiri* groups by discussing the “*takfiri* mentality” – the labeling of others as unbelievers, whom then are worthy of being slaughtered for “trivial reasons”. Nasrallah states, “We are not approaching the issue from a Shi‘i or Sunni perspective as some try to accuse us. We are rather approaching the issue from a perspective from which we see Muslims and Christians alike threatened by this current mentality and Takfiri project that is creeping to the region ... this project is funded by America because this [the resistance] is what [needs to be] removed for it to destroy the region and thus to take it over again before the awakening of the peoples, the up-rising of the peoples, and the wills of the peoples”.

Finally, Nasrallah moves to conclude his speech by stating three fundamental points that largely lay out Hezbollah’s stated views towards the Syrian conflict. First, the dominance and control of Takfiri groups is a major problem for the whole region. Second, and related to the first point, Nasrallah reiterates that Syria is no longer a popular battleground, but rather it is a place for American and Israeli political projects to be played out. Finally, Nasrallah downright states “Syria is the backbone of the resistance, and the support of the resistance. The resistance cannot sit with hands crossed while its backbone is held vulnerable and its support is being broken or else we will be stupid. Stupid is he who stands motionless while watching death, the siege and conspiracy crawling towards him. He would be stupid then. However, the responsible, rational man [referring to Hezbollah] acts with absolute responsibility”.¹³² Nasrallah continues to link the Syrian opposition campaign to the popular fears and contempt towards Israel among the Lebanese people, arguing that if Syria falls into the hands of the Americans, Israelis, and *takfiris*, Hezbollah and Lebanon would be besieged, and Israel would re-enter Lebanon and impose its conditions on the Lebanese people. Nasrallah incites fear of Israeli aggression and occupation, an especially relevant topic on Eid al-Muqawama, and fear of *takfiri* violence, giving his listeners the option

¹³² Levitt, *Hezbollah*, 383.

to choose who to side with, but stating “As for Hezbollah, it can’t be [in] a front which [includes] Israel, the U.S., and those who stab chests, behead others, and disintomb graves”.

Chapter Conclusion

In these first three speeches, Nasrallah lays out his basic framework for justifying Hezbollah’s entry into the Syrian theater. Of course, this framework will evolve based on the criticism Hezbollah will receive and incidents that will occur within Lebanon – things Hezbollah could not predict in May 2013. A few key points emerge from these speeches. First, Nasrallah connects everything happening in Syria to Israel. These *takfiri* groups are sponsored by Israel to distract and destroy the region while Israel consolidates its position in the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the al-Assad regime, its faults aside, is the region’s best hope for continuing the fight against Israel. Second, as a result of the emergence of these *takfiri* groups, the region’s inhabitants have more to fear than just an Israeli victory. Hezbollah brands the Syrian opposition as an existential threat to the livelihoods and rights of *all* of the region’s inhabitants, Muslim and Christian alike. These statements form the groundwork for Hezbollah’s later articulation of itself as a valiant defender of the Lebanese state, system, and people and the region’s threatened minorities.

Chapter 4 – Hezbollah’s Responses to Terrorism

An Attack in al-Dahieh – August 16th, 2013

On August 16th, 2013, Nasrallah gave a speech responding to the previous day's bombing in southern Beirut. In typical fashion, Nasrallah begins his address by bringing up the group's record of confronting Israel. He carefully connects the specific case he discusses, the battle for the Southern village of Aita al-Shaab in the 2006 War, to the recent Beirut attack.

This battle, part of which had fortuitously occurred in August 2006, the same month as Nasrallah's speech, was somewhat unique. Not only was the battle a 33-day Israeli siege of the Southern village, most of the Lebanese combatants were not professional Hezbollah fighters but part-time Hezbollah reserve soldiers who were simply residents of the besieged village. Nasrallah states that Hezbollah's resistance campaign in 2006 was so successful and remains a case study for militaries around the world in large degree due to popular civilian resistance. Nasrallah implores his followers to remain resolute, just like the villagers of Aita al-Shaab, in the face of takfiri attacks like the one recently witnessed in Beirut. Nasrallah assures his listeners that Hezbollah is militarily stronger than ever, despite the many trials the group has faced since 2006.¹³³

Next, Nasrallah discusses the recent bombing directly. He states that the attack was not targeted specifically at Hezbollah positions, offices, or soldiers, but at civilians. In fact, he states, the goal of this attack was to incur the highest civilian losses possible in an effort to remove the determination of the people. Nasrallah encourages his listeners not to fall for this attempt and to remain devoted to resisting Israel and *takfiri* groups.

The way in which Nasrallah frames the goal of the attacker(s) is key. If this bombing was actually about Hezbollah's participation in the Syrian Civil War, why would the attacker target civilians and not Hezbollah military infrastructure? Instead, this bombing was about the victim's identities as Shi'i

¹³³ MTVLebanonNews, "Press Conference – Hassan Nasrallah 16 Aug 2013." Youtube, August 16, 2013, 35:35.

Muslims, who are deemed apostates under *takfiri* ideology. This is an effort by Nasrallah to reverse the narratives articulated by Syrian opposition groups. Hezbollah's participation in Syria is not inspiring these attacks – they would occur anyway since the opposition is afflicted by *takfiri* ideologies which deem non-*takfiris* as apostates. Instead, Hezbollah's participation in Syria is part of a proactive process to eradicate this ideology. Attacks like this one would occur regardless, and likely with greater frequency, if Hezbollah was not fighting in Syria.

Nasrallah next describes the suspects of the Ruwais attack. First, he suggests that Israel is always involved, in some way or another, in this process. Nasrallah rarely fails to mention Israel and connect it to whatever controversial issues Hezbollah is dealing with. The next suspect are *takfiri* groups. Nasrallah again tries to dissociate bombings of Shi'i areas in South Beirut with Hezbollah's Syrian campaign by stating that these groups have stated their desires to kill non-*takfiris* and spread sectarian tension since the beginning of conflict, well before Hezbollah entered Syria in 2013.¹³⁴ Nasrallah also cryptically speaks of a third, unnamed suspect, which looks to spread sectarian strife and harm the region. This unnamed actor is possibly Saudi Arabia or another Arab Gulf state. Though Nasrallah names three potential suspects, he hopes to give the impression that all of these groups work together in a regional conspiracy which Hezbollah attempts to counter. Nasrallah says that even when *takfiri* groups carry out the final stages of an attack, these groups work with American, Israeli, and "regional" intelligence services to plan them.¹³⁵ Nasrallah almost certainly is referring to Arab Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar. In later communications, Nasrallah's hesitancy to speak of these countries by name will disappear.

Next, Nasrallah transitions to address the Lebanese as a whole. He states that *takfiri* groups "kill Sunnis like they kill Shi'is, and kill Muslims like they kill Christians. They bomb mosques like they bomb churches and bomb Shi'i mosques like they bomb Sunni mosques."¹³⁶ Nasrallah's main argument is that although Shi'is are currently being killed, Christians and Sunnis could easily be next. Having

¹³⁴ Ibid., 49:40

¹³⁵ Ibid., 55:52

¹³⁶ Ibid., 59:00

established this vision of *takfirism* as an ideology which is inherently hostile and aggressive towards anyone outside of certain narrow interpretations of Islam, Nasrallah encourages all Lebanese to join together to prevent massacres similar to the Ruwais bombing.

The Bombing of Iran's Embassy – December 3rd, 2013

The bombing of Iran's embassy, though not directly targeted against Hezbollah itself, was nevertheless an extremely symbolic occurrence. The bombing attracted extensive news coverage and turned the Lebanese and regional discussion towards Hezbollah's complicity in what many view as Iran's support for atrocities in Syria. The Abdullah Azzam Brigades claimed responsibility for this attack, as well as for the February 2014 bombing of the Iranian Cultural Center in Beirut.^{137 138} The Iranian government itself blamed Israel for the bombing of its embassy.¹³⁹

As previously mentioned, one of AAB's central strategies is to differentiate between the interests of Iran and Hezbollah and those of Lebanese Shi'is. In a statement concerning AAB's second bombing – that of the Iranian Cultural Center in February 2014 – the group actively looks to shed any *takfiri* label whatsoever. The report states, "we believe in the sacredness of the blood of Muslim non-combatants ... the Abdullah Azzam Brigades does not target Shi'is in general."¹⁴⁰ To be seen as targeting non-combatants on a religious basis validates Hezbollah's narrative, and these communications by AAB point towards the effectiveness of Hezbollah's communications in articulating a narrative of *takfiri* threats. Hezbollah throughout its existence has sought to reinforce a transnational Shi'i vision to its followers by arguing that, since all Shi'is are threatened by Sunni tyranny, Lebanon's Shi'is in fact share Iran's interests. By specifically attacking Iranian targets and, when possible, avoiding Shi'i civilian casualties,

¹³⁷ Aryn Baker, "The Abdullah Azzam Brigades: Behind the Terrorist Group That Bombed Iran's Beirut Embassy," November 20, 2013. <http://world.time.com/2013/11/20/the-abdullah-azzam-brigades-behind-the-group-that-bombed-irans-beirut-embassy/>

¹³⁸ Erika Solomon, "Al Qaeda-linked group claims Beirut bombing," February 19, 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-blast-idUSBREA110BQ20140219>

¹³⁹ Aryn Baker, "The Abdullah Azzam Brigades: Behind the Terrorist Group That Bombed Iran's Beirut Embassy," November 20, 2013. <http://world.time.com/2013/11/20/the-abdullah-azzam-brigades-behind-the-group-that-bombed-irans-beirut-embassy/>

¹⁴⁰ Abdullah Azzam Brigades, "Bayan bishan ghazwat al-mustashariyya al-Iraniyya fi Beirut," (statement regarding the bombing of the Iranian Embassy in Beirut). <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/e28098abd-allah-e28098azzc481m-brigades-22on-the-raid-of-the-iranian-cultural-center-in-beirut22.pdf>

AAB seeks to sever this transnational vision and show Lebanon's Shi'is that Hezbollah and Iran invite more harm than good.

Nasrallah, in a lengthy December 3rd, 2013 interview broadcasted on Lebanese television, openly chastises Saudi Arabia and accuses their intelligence service (*al-Mukhabarat al-A'amah*) of sponsoring local proxies to carry out the recent attack on Iran's embassy. However, to bolster this claim, Nasrallah dedicates a good portion of time during towards the beginning of the interview to argue that Saudi Arabia has long sponsored local proxies (*wusata*) since it is unable to fight its own wars. Nasrallah states that Saudi funding and provocation led to the Iran-Iraq War, which, while calamitous for Iranians and Iraqis, was also devastating for the Palestinians and their cause. Saudi Arabia, according to Nasrallah, has utilized proxies to divide Muslims and topple governments in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, and Iran.¹⁴¹

Throughout this interview, Nasrallah attempts to distance himself from the Iran-Saudi Arabia power struggle, the most recent manifestation of which was the bombing of Iran's embassy. He acknowledges that Hezbollah and Iran have shared interests, namely countering Saudi Arabia's scheme to destabilize the Middle East using proxy actors. But Nasrallah firmly states that Iran plays no role in Hezbollah or Lebanon's domestic affairs.¹⁴² Given the grim news concerning Iran's embassy, this is an attempt by Nasrallah to distance Hezbollah from the sphere of international relations and highlight its status as a domestic Lebanese actor.

Prompted by his interviewer, Nasrallah shifts to discuss Hezbollah's participation in the Syrian theater. Nasrallah states that Hezbollah's goals from the start have been to defend Lebanon's territory and populace and to protect threatened people and shrines within Syria itself. To Nasrallah, Lebanon's safety will come once political stability returns to Syria, and Hezbollah fights in Syria to bring about that political stability.¹⁴³ Ultimately, the resolution of the Syrian Civil War will come through a negotiated

¹⁴¹ Syrie*Syria_Siria: Interview, Documentaire, Discours, Analyse, "Interview exclusive de Sayed Hassan Nasrallah sur la chaîne libanaise OTV. (En arabe, 03/12/2013)" YouTube, December 4, 2013, 24:00. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9kfQirHZvs>

¹⁴² Ibid., 41:30.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 48:40.

settlement. Nasrallah states that Bashar al-Assad has been and remains willing to negotiate with the Syrian opposition, but that the opposition refuses to negotiate. This opposition is foreign by nature, and Nasrallah asserts that they are controlled by Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar, all of whom wish for the violent overthrow of the al-Assad regime with no option for negotiations.¹⁴⁴

Pressed specifically about Hezbollah's operational timeline in the Syrian theater, Nasrallah states that Hezbollah's first operations took place in the Rif Qusayr area¹⁴⁵ near the Lebanese border to protect threatened Lebanese villages. Nasrallah mentions not only Shi'i-majority villages but Christian villages such as al-Qaa.¹⁴⁶ Had Hezbollah not intervened to protect these border villages, Nasrallah argues, they would have undoubtedly fallen to armed Syrian opposition groups which would have threatened their residents.¹⁴⁷

Next, Nasrallah discusses the issue of threatened Shi'i and Christian shrines in Syria. The main concern, he states, is not the shrines themselves, but the "sectarian strife" (*fitna madhhabiya*) which would result from these shrines being destroyed.¹⁴⁸ In an effort to appeal to Sunni and Shi'i Muslims alike, Nasrallah discusses these shrines' heritage and importance for Islamic history. Here, he portrays Hezbollah's actions in peaceful terms, seeking to prevent further sectarian damage by *takfiri* groups. In his discussion of these shrines and villages, Nasrallah is careful to appeal to all sectarian groups. As demonstrated by Nasrallah's words, a crucial component of Hezbollah's ideological reformation is to portray itself in as inclusive terms as possible.

Later in his speech, Nasrallah states, "we went to Syria to defend Lebanon."¹⁴⁹ This statement in effect positions Hezbollah as a defender of Lebanon's status-quo. The importance of this should not be understated. As has been shown, Hezbollah's early ideology called for radical shifts in Lebanon's society

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 50:40.

¹⁴⁵ *Rif* refers to the countryside or rural surroundings of a place, in this case the city of al-Qusayr.

¹⁴⁶ al-Qaa, a Christian village in the Bekaa Valley, has seen considerable spillover from the Syrian Civil War, including a suicide bombing in 2016 which killed 5 people.

¹⁴⁷ "Interview exclusive de Sayed Hassan Nasrallah," December 3rd, 55:20.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 56:40.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 1:12:30.

and power structures and the implementation of an Iranian-style Islamic government. Now, to appeal to Lebanese Christians, Nasrallah champions Lebanon's system as the preferable alternative to extremist Islamic rule.

Responding to his interviewer's inquiry regarding Iran's role in Hezbollah's decision making, Nasrallah asserts that he did not visit Iran prior to Hezbollah's intervention in Syria in May 2013 and that Iran played no role in Hezbollah's decision to go into Syria.¹⁵⁰ While both statements are almost certainly untrue, it is the second instance in Nasrallah's interview – which aired nationally and had wide viewership – where he downplays Iran's role in Hezbollah's decision making. Nasrallah fully admits Hezbollah's alignment with Iranian policies and interests, though his rhetoric serves to discredit the notion of Hezbollah as Iran's private militia and instead portray Hezbollah as an independent rational actor – a strategic partner of Iran.

To conclude his argument for the necessity of Hezbollah's participation in the Syrian Civil War, Nasrallah uses Syria and Iraq – countries he sees as having fallen to *takfiri* groups – as examples of the danger posed to Lebanon. Nasrallah mentions the hundreds of car bombings, political assassinations, and terrorist incidents that occur in parts of Iraq and Syria, and asserts that this situation could become Lebanon's reality as well. Nasrallah mentions al-Nabek, the capital of Syria's Qalamoun district in the Rif Dimashq governorate, as the point of origin for numerous car bombs en route to Lebanon. These car bombers, according to Nasrallah, not only threaten minorities – Shi'is and Christians – but non-*takfiri* Sunnis as well.¹⁵¹ Nasrallah states throughout his interview that Hezbollah, by securing Lebanon and Syria's border regions, has stopped hundreds of would-be car-bombers from terrorizing Lebanon.¹⁵² To emphatically conclude his discussion of Syria, Nasrallah states, "if Syria falls into the hands of these armed groups, there is not a future for Lebanon... not just for minorities, but for all Lebanese."¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 1:01:00.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 1:06:40.

¹⁵² Ibid., 1:41:47.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 1:09:30.

Next, Nasrallah shifts his discussion to the bombing of Iran's embassy. Nasrallah's primary goal in presenting the embassy bombing is to disconnect it as much as possible from Hezbollah's participation in the Syria campaign. Accordingly, Nasrallah states that the *Dahieh* bombings – those targeting Shi'is in Beirut's suburbs – are fundamentally different in nature from the bombing of Iran's embassy.¹⁵⁴ This is because the bombing of Iran's embassy is part of a larger war declared by a variety of Arab governments against Iran.¹⁵⁵ This war is primarily led by Saudi Arabia's intelligence services, whom Nasrallah characterizes as the leader of this war and the culprit of this bombing. Nasrallah next lists Saudi Arabia's connections to terrorism, including the kingdom's support of terrorist groups in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq and alleged connection to Majid Bin Muhammad al-Majid, the emir of the Abdullah Azzam Brigades and a Saudi national. Nasrallah states that most of the branches of the "al-Qaeda ideology" are connected to Saudi intelligence.¹⁵⁶

According to Nasrallah, Saudi Arabia's intelligence services attempt to stir sectarian strife and create civil wars. In fact, the same pattern that they exhibited by bombing Iran's embassy is exhibited in the almost daily car bombings that afflict Baghdad, Iraq. Nasrallah asserts that these car bombings are supported by Saudi Arabia, since the Saudi government will go to any price to topple the Shi'i Iraqi government.¹⁵⁷ Nasrallah says that Saudi Arabia's behavior – supporting violent proxies – is due to its frustration with its failed regional plans to topple governments and create civil wars in Iraq and Lebanon.¹⁵⁸

Chapter Conclusion

These two speeches demonstrate the different strategies employed by Hezbollah in responding to suicide terrorism in Lebanon. When discussing the Ruwais bombing, Nasrallah makes it clear that this

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 1:42:24.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 1:42:52.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 1:43:11.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 1:44:00.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 1:45:50.

bombing occurred *because* the victims were Shi'is. This bombing is thus a deadly manifestation of the *takfiri* ideology. Nasrallah connects resistance to *takfiris* – who, he argues in previous speeches, are connected to and supported by Israel – to resistance against Israel by Lebanese villagers in the 2006 War. Whether the formal aggressor is Israel or a *takfiri* group, Nasrallah argues that in reality the enemy is one and the same. But when the target switches from Lebanese Shi'is to Iranian Shi'is, Nasrallah's message changes. He attempts to consolidate international relations – the Iran-Saudi Arabia conflict – in a separate track which is unrelated to Hezbollah's decisions. This explains Nasrallah's insistence that the Embassy bombing was carried out by Saudi intelligence. The attack was probably in retaliation both for Iran's own participation in the Syrian Civil War as well as its sponsorship and encouragement of Hezbollah's participation in the War. Hezbollah looks to subtly dissociate itself from Iran, because the more it appears to be Iran's dutiful proxy, the less it appears to be working for the best interests of the Lebanese people.

These two addresses see Nasrallah escalate his pro-Christian rhetoric. Just like Shi'is, Christians are and will continue to be targeted for their religious identities. Nasrallah uses scare-tactics in his attempts to reach Christians, highlighting Lebanese border villages which have been threatened and the risks that a *takfiri* takeover would pose to the Lebanese confessional system. Nasrallah implies that the Lebanese system gives Christians dignity and freedoms which would be absent under a Sunni Islamic state. Nasrallah looks to win Christian support by portraying Hezbollah as the sole actor working to defend Lebanon.

Chapter 5 – Further Crises

The Assassination of Hezbollah Commander Hassan al-Laqqis – December 20th, 2013

Senior Hezbollah commander Hassan al-Laqqis was assassinated outside of his Beirut apartment on the night of December 3rd, 2013. As was the case for Imad Mughniyah (assassinated in Damascus in 2008) and other senior Hezbollah operatives, al-Laqqis' identity was kept secret until his death, at which point his martyrdom was vigorously celebrated by Hezbollah through parades and public addresses by Nasrallah. Though Hezbollah seldom publishes details about the military activities of its fallen commanders, enough external information is available on al-Laqqis to construct a biographical sketch and highlight both his importance to the organization and the symbolic impact of his assassination.

Levitt identifies al-Laqqis as Hezbollah's "chief procurement officer", and a report states that he was the in charge of Hezbollah's weapons systems and technological infrastructure development and played a key role in Hezbollah's missile program and naval and amphibious warfare divisions.^{159 160} Furthermore, he is given credit for developing Hezbollah's extensive bunker and tunnel networks in South Lebanon and for masterminding the infamous Ansariya ambush of 1997 in which twelve Israeli commandos were trapped and killed in South Lebanon.¹⁶¹ al-Laqqis was also a close friend of Hassan Nasrallah, and the two are thought to have studied together in Baalbek under Abbas al-Mussawi, Hezbollah's former leader.¹⁶²

al-Laqqis, who spoke fluent Persian, worked closely with Hezbollah's Iranian contacts. In a meeting with Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader allegedly mistook al-Laqqis to be Iranian, not Lebanese.^{163 164} In the months before his assassination, al-Laqqis was apparently planning combat operations in Syria, collecting UAV-based intelligence against would-be car bombers, and, just days

¹⁵⁹ Levitt, *Hezbollah*, 167.

¹⁶⁰ "The complete story behind the life and death of Hassan al-Laqqis," *Kataeb.org*, June 30, 2014.

¹⁶¹ Blanford, *Warriors of God*, Chapter 5.

¹⁶² "The complete story behind the life and death of Hassan al-Laqqis," *Kataeb.org*, June 30, 2014.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ "Hezbollah commander Hassan Lakkis killed in Beirut," *BBC*, December 4, 2013.

before his assassination, liaising with the Iranian delegation that arrived to investigate the recent Embassy bombing.¹⁶⁵

Hezbollah issued a statement immediately following the assassination of Hassan al-Laqqis accusing Israel of the assassination. A press release stated, “Israel is automatically held the complete responsibility for this heinous crime and was subjected several times and in several areas to failed assassination attempts. This enemy should bear full responsibility and all consequences of this heinous crime, and this repeated targeting of dear resistance leaders and cadres.”¹⁶⁶

al-Laqqis’ assassination occurred at an especially inopportune time for Hezbollah, with the group already struggling to contend with fallout from the various attacks in Lebanon, strong Hezbollah participation in Syria’s Qalamoun region, and an ever-tenser domestic Lebanese political scene. In response to these pressures, Nasrallah, in an important speech given on December 20th, 2013, strikes a surprisingly conciliatory tone, focusing on uniting Lebanon’s various factions around the dangers posed to the country by Israel. Nasrallah makes multiple overtures not only to Christians and minority sects, but to Sunnis, seeking to categorically differentiate them from the *takfiri* groups in Syria and Lebanon. Nasrallah also speaks with a remarkable degree of candor regarding the Syrian conflict and the roles of Iran and other foreign actors in Lebanon.

After greeting his crowd and paying his respects to Hassan al-Laqqis, Nasrallah dives into a discussion of al-Laqqis’ assassination: “all of the connections and signs point us to accuse the Israeli enemy.”¹⁶⁷ Nasrallah states that the Israelis had made previous attempts on the life of al-Laqqis and that this assassination thus fits a well-established pattern. Despite Israel’s denial of culpability and the fact that a previously unknown group – *Liwa Ahrar al-Sunna Baalbek* or the Free Sunnis of Baalbek – claimed responsibility for the assassination, Nasrallah remains steadfast in his accusation of Israel and implies that Israel likely planned the killing and contracted it out to local, potentially Gulf state-sponsored actors.

¹⁶⁵ “The complete story behind the life and death of Hassan al-Laqqis,” *Kataeb.org*, June 30, 2014.

¹⁶⁶ “Hezbollah Official Assassinated in Hadath, Israel Held Responsible,” *Al Manar*, December 4, 2013.

¹⁶⁷ Hassan Nasrallah, “2013-12-20 الحفل التأبيني للشهيد حسان اللقيس – 2013-12-20,” YouTube, December 20, 2013, 11:30.

Nasrallah states that the Israeli government and media deliberately muddled the waters regarding the true assassins in an effort to drive further sectarianism within Lebanon. Here, Israel is seen as not only targeting Hezbollah, but the stability of the entire Lebanese state.

Nasrallah continues to develop his argument by bringing up Hezbollah's self-described victories over the Israelis – their 2000 withdrawal from Lebanon, Hezbollah's support for the subsequent al-Aqsa Intifada, and the July 2006 War – and stating that Israel and Hezbollah's Arab adversaries have grown frustrated by their inability to destroy Hezbollah through conventional military means.¹⁶⁸ Given this frustration, Hezbollah argues that these Hezbollah enemies have adopted a new strategy to counter the group: exacerbating Lebanese sectarian divisions to a point that these divisions end up consuming Lebanon on their own and destroying Hezbollah in the process. According to Nasrallah, Israeli allegations that the attack was carried out by Lebanese Sunnis are part of this strategy of destabilizing Lebanon from within.

As in previous speeches, Hezbollah connects this same strategy employed by Israel and hostile Arab countries to the situation in Syria. These frustrated states, Nasrallah argues, view the support of destructive *takfiri* groups as the only option to defeating the Axis of Resistance. Nasrallah states that the “battle against Israel takes many forms,” by which he refers to both face-to-face confrontations between Hezbollah and Israeli troops and indirect warfare against Israelis by targeting their *takfiri* proxies within Syria.¹⁶⁹ Nasrallah assures his supporters that although Hezbollah takes losses from time-to-time, these losses are parts of the inevitable price – *thaman* – that the group pays for its steadfastness on the path of resistance and its refusal to compromise its values. Nasrallah's message is mainly directed towards his own supporters up until this point. He implores them to direct their anger for the death of al-Laqqis towards Israel and towards the *takfiri* groups instead of towards their fellow Lebanese, recognizing the dangers posed to Hezbollah by low-level street brawls between Shi'is and Sunnis.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 15:30.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 29:30.

Nasrallah now shifts his attention from al-Laqqis' assassination to Lebanese sectarianism more generally, addressing the political leaders from the rival March 14th Alliance whom he claims recently compared Hezbollah to the Sunni *takfiri* groups for supporting the killing of innocents.¹⁷⁰ In classic fashion, Nasrallah poses two options for his domestic opponents: 1) decide that cooperation with Hezbollah is impossible, thus provoking fruitless fights with the group and hurting the Lebanese people in the process, and 2) recognize that, despite their differences, there are causes around which the various Lebanese factions can unite, one of which being supporting the Lebanese Army as a national institution dedicated to the safety of the Lebanese. Nasrallah indicates that he clearly favors option two – reconciliation between the competing factions – given that Hezbollah is already preoccupied with its fight against the Israelis and thus has no interest in damaging Lebanon through confrontations with other Lebanese.

Nasrallah accuses the March 14th alliance of waging a war against Hezbollah by conflating Hezbollah and the *takfiri* groups. Nasrallah seeks to reverse this narrative by stating that this treatment of Hezbollah by the March 14th Alliance serves only to increase sectarianism within Lebanon. Instead, Nasrallah states that Hezbollah wishes to heal Lebanese sectarianism, and that its actions in Syria are to eliminate those groups that wish to threaten Lebanon's system of religious tolerance. Thus, he implies, by opposing Hezbollah and calling for its disarmament, March 14th partisans are harming Lebanon as a whole.

Next, Nasrallah discusses external meddling in Lebanon. On a list of countries whose meddling he claims is detrimental to Lebanon, Nasrallah interestingly mentions Iran.¹⁷¹ Though it is difficult to state with certainty the reasoning behind this statement, Nasrallah likely looks to distance himself from the proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which he discusses in his interview on December 3rd. This can also be interpreted as a proactive move by Nasrallah to court Lebanese Christians. Nasrallah recognizes that Hezbollah is unlikely to win over Lebanon's Sunnis, so he instead turns his attention instead to the

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 36:57.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 55:50.

Christians. In a related maneuver, Nasrallah, while discussing Hezbollah's need to confront Israel, brings up the need to liberate Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulcher.¹⁷²

After further touching on some domestic Lebanese issues, Nasrallah concludes by discussing the Syrian conflict. Nasrallah states that while at first the Syrian conflict may have been a real popular revolution of the Syrian people against the al-Assad regime, the revolution has been stolen by externally-funded *takfiris* which pose a threat to *every* group which does not subscribe to the *takfiri* ideology.¹⁷³ In keeping with his big tent message, Nasrallah states that Sunnis are "the backbone of the *umma* [Muslim community of believers]", advancing a non-sectarian message that Hezbollah is not opposed to Sunnis and in fact wants to protect Sunnis from *takfiri* aggression.¹⁷⁴

Martyrs' Day – February 16th, 2014

On February 16th, 2014, Nasrallah gave a speech commemorating some of Hezbollah's famous early members – whom he refers to as martyrs ("*shuhada*") – such as Raghieb Harb and Abbas al-Mussawi. Nasrallah spends a portion of his speech speaking directly to Lebanese Christians through a series of rhetorical questions. First, Nasrallah asks his audience to imagine that Hezbollah had not intervened in the Lebanon-Syria border areas. "What happens when the *takfiri* groups decide to use Lebanon as a theater for Jihad, not just a theater for support ... will you fight along the entire border?"¹⁷⁵

With no small degree of sarcasm, Nasrallah asks, "where are your churches and patriarchs ... what will the world do to help you?"¹⁷⁶ Nasrallah brings up what he sees as the world's abandonment of Iraqi Christians, historically a large and vibrant minority community which has rapidly diminished in recent years,¹⁷⁷ as an example of what may happen to Lebanon's Christians should more of Syria fall to

¹⁷² Ibid., 22:20.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 1:00:43.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 1:01:40.

¹⁷⁵ Middle East Observer, "Hezbollah's Leader to Christians: 'Where are your Churches, Crosses, & Nuns?' – English Subtitles," YouTube, 0:21.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 1:15.

¹⁷⁷ Phillip Connor and Conrad Hackett, *Middle East's Christian population in flux as Pope Francis visits Holy Land*.

takfiri groups. Finally, Nasrallah brings up instances of Christians claiming that only ISIL or al-Qaeda-linked groups pose a threat. Nasrallah refutes this, stating that while these groups may differ by name, their essences and mentalities are essentially the same, and thus they all pose a threat to Lebanon.

Nasrallah's Press Conference on Syria – March 29th, 2014

On March 29th, 2014, Nasrallah held a live press conference in which he touched on most of the themes and arguments that his organization has used to justify its participation in Syria. As usual, Nasrallah begins by highlighting Hezbollah's continuing confrontation of Israel's regional plans. By grounding his rhetoric firmly within the issue of Israel's plans and the dangers it poses to Lebanon, Nasrallah appears freer to discuss contentious issues such as Hezbollah's involvement in Syria.

Nasrallah states that, since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, Hezbollah's position has always been that favoring negotiation and political compromise. Nasrallah claims that his opponents – those who call for the destruction of the al-Assad at all costs – declared war on Hezbollah, Iran, and others who supported negotiation as soon as the conflict began in 2011.¹⁷⁸ Thus, outrage over Hezbollah's decision to enter Syria in 2013 is essentially manufactured, since Hezbollah's opponents have in fact opposed the group from the beginning.

Nasrallah chastises Arab and European regimes for making the grave mistake of empowering *takfiri* groups in Syria. To Nasrallah, attempts to control *takfiri* groups once they have been empowered are essentially futile, since these groups recognize the legitimacy of nobody but themselves. This phenomenon is demonstrated by Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIL, two Syrian groups whom Nasrallah claims share almost identical desires to create Sunni Islamic states in the region. Nevertheless, the warring between these groups shows the inability of *takfiri* groups to coexist even with those with whom they

¹⁷⁸ MTVLebanonNews, "Press Conference – Hasan Nasrallah Speech - 29/03/2014," YouTube, March 29, 2014, 53:30.

share almost identical ideologies and goals. Imagine, argues Nasrallah, how these groups would behave towards Shi'is, Christians, or even moderate Sunnis.¹⁷⁹

Chapter Conclusion

In these three addresses, Nasrallah paints the assassination of Hassan al-Laqqis in terms of Hezbollah's confrontations with Israel, further distances the group from Iran, underscores his commitment to a negotiated settlement in Syria, and doubles down on his Christian outreach. In the case of Iran's embassy, Nasrallah alleges the involvement of Saudi Arabia's *mukhabarat*, going so far as to differ from Iran's official line. Yet when discussing Hassan al-Laqqis, Nasrallah strongly suggests a direct Israeli hand in the commander's assassination. By highlighting al-Laqqis' record of opposing Israel, Nasrallah makes a connection between al-Laqqis' work against *takfiri* groups in Syria with his work against Israel. After all, if al-Laqqis did not still pose a threat to Israel, why would the Israelis have expended the effort to professionally assassinate him? This connection is harder to make regarding Iran and Israel, so Nasrallah compartmentalizes the bombing of Iran's embassy into the realm of international relations.

Nasrallah seeks to challenge the view that one needs adhere to Iran's Shi'i Islam in order to support Hezbollah's political and military moves. Hezbollah never denies its Shi'i character – this aspect is inseparable from the group's identity. But Nasrallah does argue that Hezbollah's interests are compatible with the interests of Lebanese Christians. To make this argument, Nasrallah needs to portray Hezbollah as an independent nationalistic actor, free from the grip of Iran. He does so by subtly criticizing Iran's meddling in Lebanon. Having dissociated his group from Iran, Nasrallah in his segment from February 16th is able to present Hezbollah as the only remaining actor willing and able to protect Christians.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 1:04:43.

Chapter 6 – Analysis and Conclusion

Analysis

Hassan Nasrallah is undoubtedly a captivating orator with a wide, though not always supportive, regional audience. Hezbollah has used Nasrallah's rhetorical skills to construct a communications strategy that is both reactive and proactive. Hezbollah attempts to justify and counter criticism of its actions in Syria while actively seeking allies – regional Christians and other minority groups – in the process. While Nasrallah sometimes seems to ramble or repeat points, Hezbollah's communications are by no means random. Like any adept political organization, both the content and timing of Nasrallah's addresses are carefully and strategically planned. This section will summarize Hezbollah's strategies, based on the sources examined in this paper, and analyze these strategies in their wider ideological and geopolitical contexts.

First and foremost, Hezbollah attempts to impress upon its audience that it remains committed to resistance against Israel. There are three main goals Hezbollah seeks to achieve from this insistence. First, despite the emergence of the Syrian Civil War and other prominent regional phenomena, the Arab-Israel conflict is still a major cause célèbre throughout the Arab world. Though currently Hezbollah is anathema to most of the regions Sunni Muslims, Hezbollah remains the only Arab entity to ever defeat Israel militarily. Thus, Hezbollah looks to affect public opinion among the Sunni Arab masses by nostalgically reminding them of the days in which Hezbollah fought Israel with the support of almost the entire Arab world. However, Hezbollah's efforts to sway Sunni opinion are essentially futile; the group is too connected to the loathsome figure of Bashar al-Assad.

Hezbollah's second reason for insisting on its status as a resistance organization relates to its own Lebanese constituency. Israel's extended occupation of South Lebanon left considerable scars on the residents of the South. Combined with destructive incursions since Israel's withdrawal in 2000, namely the July 2006 War, anti-Israel sentiment remains rife in South Lebanon. Nasrallah's identity among his

supporters is fundamentally linked to resistance against Israel. References to Hezbollah's confrontations with Israel can never go wrong. Hezbollah understands the sacrifices that its intervention in Syria imposes upon its constituents – terrorist attacks, Hezbollah casualties, and even just social tensions between Shi'is and their neighbors – and looks to justify its intervention in as acceptable terms as possible.

Accordingly, the third reason for Hezbollah's insistence on its status as a resistance group against Israel is because this identity forms the foundation for all of Hezbollah's rhetoric concerning Syria. In Hezbollah's ideal situation, rather than articulating a new identity for its Syrian campaign, the group's resistance activities are simply transferred from one theater to another. This is even evident from the progression of Nasrallah's speeches, in which he glides seamlessly from a discussion of Hezbollah's confrontations with Israel to one of the group's participation in the Syrian conflict. According to Nasrallah, the issues in Syria have their root with Israel and its Western backers. Israel's goal is to distract and incapacitate the Arabs while it consolidates its hold on Palestine and eliminates the Israel-Arab conflict as an issue. The Israelis' instrument in achieving this goal is the sponsorship of *takfiri* groups which, if left unchecked, will divide the Arabs and lead to the disintegration of their societies. Thus, by opposing these *takfiri* groups in Syria, Hezbollah is in fact confronting Israel.

The emergence of Sunni jihadi groups and Hezbollah's own construction of a *takfiri* bogeyman in Syria has proved enormously useful for the group. If, for example, the Syrian opposition had remained mainly secular, calling for an end to the al-Assad regime but not for the establishment of an Islamic state (as ISIL, Jabhat al-Nusra, Jaish al-Islam, Ahrar al-Sham, and others have done), Hezbollah would have faced far more difficulty in justifying its decision to intervene in Syria to Lebanese Shi'is and Christians. The strength and prominence that these Islamist groups have assumed has allowed Nasrallah to make blanket statements concerning the identities and motivations of Syria's heterogeneous opposition groups. Even if the character of the Syrian opposition had been completely secular, Hezbollah would have felt pressure to intervene on behalf of the al-Assad regime. The heinous acts committed by Syrian groups, ISIL in particular, have in fact helped Hezbollah tremendously in framing itself as a defender rather than an aggressor.

Another important component of Hezbollah's strategy is its calculated approach to international relations, namely the Iran-Saudi Arabia regional power struggle, and to its own role as an actor intimately connected to Iran. The examined speeches indicate a gradual distancing of the group from its Iranian ally and at times even qualified condemnation of the Syrian regime it is fighting to preserve. Through most of the group's history, Iran has been Hezbollah's primary ally in terms of ideological alignment whereas the Hezbollah-Syria alliance has been shaped mainly by geopolitical concerns, which include Hezbollah's use of Syria as a waystation for Iranian arms and al-Assad's sponsorship of Hezbollah as a deterrent against Israel. After all, the Syrian regime's Alawi doctrines, while technically classified under Shi'i Islam,¹⁸⁰ differ considerably from mainstream Shi'i doctrines.

Hezbollah has maintained its rhetorical support of the Iranian regime throughout its Syrian campaign. In a Bahraini propaganda film glorifying Iranian Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani, interview segments show Hassan Nasrallah calling the Quds Force the "front line" in Iran's process of supporting its regional allies and countering regional projects.^{181 182} Given the strong linkages between Hezbollah and Iran – as enshrined in Hezbollah's 1985 Manifesto and by the continued sharing of resources, personnel, and intelligence between the two actors – the group has more difficulty dissociating itself from Iran than it does from Syria.

Hezbollah's main strategy in dissociating itself from Iran has been to reframe its position vis-à-vis the Islamic Republic. Nasrallah routinely refers to Iran as Hezbollah's "partner" or "ally" as opposed to its "sponsor" or "guide". In the 1980s, when Hezbollah was still a nascent organization and when Iran's revolutionary Shi'ism still found some adherents in the Sunni world, this rhetoric was not problematic. Nevertheless, as Hezbollah has developed and undertaken major political roles, it has

¹⁸⁰ Ari Heistein, "Iran's Support for Syria Pragmatic, not Religious (or, Who are the Alawites?)," *Informed Comment*, August 19, 2015. For most of Islamic history, Alawis were not even considered Muslims. In fact, in 1973 Musa al-Sadr proclaimed the Muslim nature of the Alawism as the Syrian regime faced criticism from the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood. Heistein convincingly argues that one should view Syria's alliances with Iran and Hezbollah in secular, not sectarian terms.

¹⁸¹ Bahrain Future, "هذا هو قاسم سليماني | This is Qasem Soleimani," YouTube, September 27, 2015.

¹⁸² "The Structure of Power in Iran: An overview of the Iranian government and political system," *Frontline*. The Quds Force ("Sepah e-Quds") is Iran's special forces unit for foreign operations. The group operates directly under Iran's Supreme Leader; the Quds Force differs from both Iran's conventional military forces, the *Artesh*, and the *Pasdaran*, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). The latter was deployed to Lebanon's Bekaa Valley in the 1980s to train Shi'i fighters.

attempted to appear as something of Iran's equal – part of a strategic partnership in which both parties benefit. Hezbollah's opponents have painted the group as nothing more than Iran's private militia, fighting in Syria at the whim of external sponsors. This criticism is especially damaging for Hezbollah since it severely hinders the group's argument that it fights in Syria to protect Lebanon. The less agency Hezbollah appears to have, the less convincing are its justifications for its participation in the Syrian Civil War.

In order to combat these criticisms of Hezbollah based on its relationship with Iran, Nasrallah has stated that Hezbollah's decision to intervene in Syria was its own, not Iran's. By stressing that this decision was Hezbollah's alone, Nasrallah's arguments that the group's purposes in Syria are to protect Lebanon and the region's civilians from *takfiri* groups are far more convincing. These arguments are considerably less convincing if it appears that Hezbollah intervened in Syria in large degree to serve Iran's geopolitical interests. Nasrallah's decision to highlight Saudi Arabia's alleged role in the bombing of Iran's embassy in Beirut also demonstrates his desire to disentangle Hezbollah, as much as possible, from the realm of international relations. This demonstrates an attempted shift by Hezbollah from a transnational Shi'i movement which was intimately connected to the revolutionary tenets of Iran's Islamic Republic to a movement which expresses an overt version of Lebanese nationalism. In this new identity which Hezbollah hopes to express, Iran remains the group's most important ally on both ideological and strategic levels. But Hezbollah has tried to move away from a model in which it is Iran's proxy to one in which Hezbollah and Iran are strategic partners, each of which possesses full agency.

Even as Hezbollah fights on behalf of the al-Assad regime – one of the group's riskiest strategic choices to date – the group has expressed some criticism of the al-Assad regime's dictatorial characteristics. In fact, the group has generally refrained from stating its outright *support* of the regime and instead has focused on the necessity of a negotiated, political settlement. In theory, Nasrallah has respected the legitimacy of calls for the removal of the al-Assad regime during the beginning of the Syrian Civil War. His caveat, though, is that these calls were only valid since they were made by actual

Syrian citizens, whereas now he claims that most of the current Syrian opposition consists of foreign fighters. Thus, any legitimacy that the Syrian opposition possessed in 2011 has since evaporated.

Hezbollah looks to frame its participation in the Syrian Civil War as an active campaign against *takfiri* groups instead of a defense of the al-Assad regime. When Hezbollah has spoken in terms of defense, it has been either in terms of threatened Lebanese or religious sites. Regardless of what Nasrallah says, Hezbollah's primary reason for entering the Syrian conflict was to protect the al-Assad regime. This is not to imply that Hezbollah was not concerned for threatened Shi'i religious sites; these sites – Sayyidah Zeinab in particular – are widely cherished by Hezbollah's Lebanese constituency, but they alone would not have led Hezbollah to justify a costly and ideological damaging campaign in a foreign war. While spillover from the Syrian Civil War into Lebanon is not an insignificant concern for Hezbollah, the group surely understood that its decision to publically send troops to Syria would lead to Sunni violence against Hezbollah supporters in Lebanon.

In addition to posing alternative explanations for the group's participation in Syria, Nasrallah has also highlighted Hezbollah's commitment to a negotiated settlement versus the forcible removal of Bashar al-Assad from power. In reality, the likelihood of al-Assad willingly stepping down from the Syrian Presidency after a negotiated settlement is and has been since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War extremely unlikely, especially given Russian, Chinese, Iranian, and other interests in the maintenance of the al-Assad regime. Thus, the push for a negotiated settlement is a convenient way for Hezbollah, as conflict rages on in Syria, to justify its participation in Syria. Nasrallah claims that Bashar al-Assad is open to negotiation regarding his status as Syria's president, but is unwilling to concede Syria to foreign-backed *takfiri* groups.

Hezbollah recognizes that within the context of its participation in the Syrian Civil War in support of Bashar al-Assad, the group is extremely unpopular among most Sunni Muslims. Nevertheless, Nasrallah attempts throughout his speeches to clearly articulate a distinction between *takfiri* groups and non-*takfiri* Sunni Muslims. Why does Nasrallah care so much about defining this distinction? If anything, one might suppose that more condemnation of Sunnis as a whole for contributing to the rise of and

participating in these *takfiri* groups would allow Hezbollah to more easily drive home its doomsday message to Shi'is and Christians – the groups that Hezbollah actually expects its message to reach. First, Hezbollah is likely tailoring its rhetoric so that if in fact the Syrian situation were to be resolved and Hezbollah returned to its glory days of confronting Israel, the group would possess some moral standing upon which to defend its participation in Syria to regional Sunnis. Second, by refraining from criticizing Sunnis as a whole, Hezbollah signals to Shi'is and Christians that it is a reasonable, tolerant actor, unlike the *takfiri* groups it is confronting. Given the turmoil and violence that Hezbollah's decisions have already inspired in Lebanon, the group does not want to be viewed as unnecessarily fanning Lebanon's sectarian fire.

The final key component of Hezbollah's strategy is the group's outreach to Lebanese Christians. This concerted outreach represents one of the largest shifts in Hezbollah's identity since the group's founding. In his speeches, Nasrallah has taken various approaches in targeting Lebanese Christians. He has linked Hezbollah's confrontations with Israel (and Syrian groups which Nasrallah describes as Israeli proxies) to the purportedly threatened state of Christian holy sites within Israeli territory. Nasrallah has also implied that Christians have just as much to fear from *takfiri* groups as Shi'is do, given these groups' intolerance for religious diversity and plans for establishing Islamic rule in the Levant.

This rhetoric towards Christians is especially important since it signifies the culmination of a shift in Hezbollah's identity that has been occurring since 1992, when Hezbollah presented a parliamentary slate in the Lebanese elections and became a political party. To cater towards Christians, Hezbollah has portrayed itself as the defender of the Lebanese confessional system – a system in which Christians maintain outsized political power, especially vis-à-vis the Shi'is themselves. In order to win Christian support, Hezbollah is in fact defending a system of Christian privileges. To appreciate the significance and magnitude of this shift in Hezbollah's identity, one need only turn to Hezbollah's 1985 Manifesto.

The policy followed by the leaders of political Maronism through the "Lebanese Front" and the "Lebanese Forces" is incapable of achieving peace and stability for the Christians in Lebanon since it is a policy founded on bigotry, sectarian privileges, and alliance with imperialism and

*Israel. The Lebanese tragedy has proven that the sectarian privileges are one of the main causes of the big explosion that has brought about the collapse of the country... Moreover, the time has come for the fanatical Christians to come out of the tunnel of sectarian loyalty and of the illusions of monopolizing privileges at the expense of others.*¹⁸³

In the group's early years, Hezbollah used the issue of the Maronites' political dominance to gain support among Shi'is. At the time, the Maronites were, among other groups, Hezbollah's logical adversaries. In addition to Christian collaboration with Israel during the Lebanese Civil War, massacres conducted by Christian militias against Palestinian refugees also roiled tensions among Hezbollah's early followers. The end of the Lebanese Civil War, and the shifting of Lebanese political power away from the Maronite president to the Sunni premiership, begun the process of reconciliation and eventual alignment of Shi'is and Christians. Today's Shi'i-Christian alliance has its roots in the 2005 end of Syria's occupation of Lebanon and the resultant pact between the Free Patriotic Movement and Hezbollah.

Lebanon's Christian community remains split between the March 8th and March 14th alliances, and Hezbollah has viewed the Syrian Civil War as an opportunity to consolidate Christian support. Critics of Hezbollah have pushed for the group's disarmament for years, and Hezbollah depends on its Christian political allies to help prevent a parliamentary resolution demanding its disarmament. The March 14th Lebanese Forces and Kata'ib parties, both of which have their roots in the Lebanese Civil War, are two formidable Christian opponents of Hezbollah. Leaked Saudi diplomatic cables released in 2015 show that Samir Geagea, current leader of the Maronite Lebanese Forces, a vocal critic of Hezbollah and the al-Assad regime, and a former

¹⁸³ Appendix B. *Nass al-risala al-maftuha allati wajjaha hizb allah ila al-mustad'afin fi lubnan wa al-'alam* in Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a*, 1987.

warlord during Lebanon's civil war, requested financial support for his party from Saudi Arabia and showed "his preparedness to do whatever the Kingdom asks of him."¹⁸⁴

Interestingly, Hezbollah's strategy requires it to send different messages to Christians versus Shi'is. Hezbollah has formulated a scenario in which the fall of al-Assad regime would be catastrophic for Christians for a variety of reasons. First, Nasrallah has used vicious executions of religious minorities by Syrian opposition groups to argue that Christians are physically threatened by *takfiri* groups. Christians are threatened by car bombings and other forms of terrorism, and these threats would be further enhanced if these groups began to take over Christian villages in Lebanon. Beyond their physical safety, Nasrallah has argued that the social and economic positions of Lebanese Christians are also under threat. Nasrallah implies that under an Islamic state, which some Syrian opposition groups wish to establish, Christians would be relegated to second-class citizenship and forced to relinquish their freedoms and rights.

By discussing demographic changes in Lebanon, Hezbollah has used rhetoric that mirrors that of right-wing Maronites during the Lebanese Civil War. Nasrallah has not criticized Lebanon's Syrian refugees outright, but it has highlighted the strain placed on the country by this large population. Just as Palestinian refugees were seen as tipping the balance away from Christians in the 1970s, Nasrallah today frames Syrian refugees as threatening to overrun the country's Christian population and remove from Lebanon any remaining Christian character. Lebanon's per capita refugee population is the highest in the world and almost triple that of Jordan, the country with the second highest per capita population.^{185 186} Hezbollah argues that a negotiated settlement – its favored policy for Syria – would allow these refugees to return to their homes in Syria and lift the burden off of Lebanon.

¹⁸⁴ Ben Hubbard, "Cables Released by WikiLeaks Reveal Saudis' Checkbook Diplomacy," *The New York Times*, June 20, 2015.

¹⁸⁵ Niall McCarthy, "The Countries With The Most Refugees Per 1,000 Inhabitants [Infographic]," *Forbes*, June 18, 2015.

¹⁸⁶ "Syria Regional Refugee Response," *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, there are approximately one million registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Like the Palestinians, the vast majority of Syrian refugees are Sunni Muslims. The actual number of registered and unregistered Syrians in Lebanon is probably much higher.

This method differs slightly from how Hezbollah messages Shi'is. Since suicide bombings have already ravaged Shi'i areas, the group frames its participation in Syria in offensive rather than defensive terms. Hezbollah looks to prevent discussion of a correlation between the group's participation in Syria and the bombings in Beirut. If the focus when Hezbollah targets Shi'is were on the group's defense of Lebanon, as it is when the group messages Christians, then Hezbollah obviously appears to be failing in its duties. Instead, Hezbollah intends for Shi'is to view the retaliatory suicide bombings as a necessary sacrifice as the group proactively confronts Israel and the West in Syria. With regard to Shi'is, Hezbollah needs to be seen as the most favorable option. The Amal Movement is a robust organization with far fewer overt ties to Syria and Iran than Hezbollah. While the two are politically aligned, Hezbollah risks losing supporters if its policies appear to be leading to terrorist attacks in Lebanon.

Have Hezbollah's Communication Strategies Been Effective?

In the period analyzed, Hezbollah has tried to reassure its Shi'i constituents, win support from Christians, and limit damage to its reputation within the Sunni community in Lebanon and abroad. Empirical public opinion data is scarce, but sources do exist which point to the effectiveness of Hezbollah's communication strategies regarding its Syria campaign.

A 2015 public opinion study examined public attitudes towards a variety of contentious political issues in Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Iran, and Turkey. Of each of the Arab countries studied, Lebanon is by far the most pro-al-Assad, Hezbollah, and Iran. A majority (60%) of Lebanese believe that the role played by the regime of Bashar al-Assad in causing conflict in Syria is "significant", but this figure is considerably less than the next Arab country, Jordan, in which 74% of subjects responded with "significant". For context, 96% of subjects in Egypt and 99% of subjects in the

United Arab Emirates responded “significant”.¹⁸⁷ When asked, “how significant is the role played by Iranian-backed groups like Hizbollah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in causing conflict in Syria?”, only 35% of Lebanese responded with “significant”, while 65% responded “not significant”. For context, the Arab country with the next highest percentage of “not significant” responses is Jordan with 26%. In Egypt, 96% responded “significant”. 53% of Lebanese Sunnis responded “significant”, while only 20% of Shi‘is and 33% of Christians responded “significant”.¹⁸⁸ 2016 data show similar results with regard to Lebanese public opinion, with about half of all Lebanese expressing favorable views of Iran.¹⁸⁹ A late-2014 survey of Lebanese Christians, which should certainly be interpreted cautiously, conducted by the Beirut Center for Research and Information shows surprisingly high levels of Christian support for Hezbollah. Results show that “66% of Christians support Hezbollah’s military intervention in Syria, in comparison to only 39 percent in June 2013 and 53 percent in February 2014.”¹⁹⁰

These numbers, if taken at face value, show that Hezbollah has managed to avoid excessive damage to its identity among Shi‘is and possibly even win support among Christians. Support for Hezbollah from Sunnis – domestic and international – is quite low, but the group has likely resigned itself to the fact that poor relations with the Sunni world are a price of surviving in the hyper-sectarian environment of the contemporary Middle East.

After a grueling period of political stalemate, Hezbollah-ally Michel Aoun was nominated to the presidency in October 2016. Moving forward, Hezbollah’s connections with Lebanese Christians will prove vital to the group’s continued survival. In February 2017, Aoun made several controversial statements regarding Hezbollah which led to wide criticism within the March 14th Alliance. In a statement confirming Hezbollah’s right to remain armed, Aoun said, “As long as Israel continues to occupy lands and the Lebanese army is not strong enough to stand up to it, we feel the need to have the resistance army as a complement to the Lebanese army’s actions.” Aoun also mentioned the Sheba‘a Farms and Kfar

¹⁸⁷ “Middle East 2015: Current and Future Challenges,” *Zagby Research Services*, November 2015, 11.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, page 12

¹⁸⁹ “Middle East 2016: Current Conditions & the Road Ahead,” *Zagby Research Services*, November 2016, 9.

¹⁹⁰ “Two-thirds of Lebanon’s Christians believe Hezbollah is protecting country,” *Al-Akhbar*, October 21, 2014.

Shuba hills – allegedly two pieces of Lebanese territory that remain under Israeli occupation – as justifications for Hezbollah’s maintaining its armed status. In words which could have easily been uttered by Nasrallah himself, Aoun stated, “The resistance’s arms are not contrary to the state project; otherwise we could have not tolerated it. It is an essential part of Lebanon’s defense.”¹⁹¹

Conclusion

Hezbollah is a complex and fascinating organization and a major regional player. For its survival, Hezbollah depends on both its external sponsors of Iran and Syria and its domestic Lebanese supporters. For much of the group’s history, when Syria and Iran were viewed as important supporters of the Palestinian cause, Hezbollah’s competing allegiances were reconcilable and possibly even helped the group win supporters. In recent years though, these competing allegiances have come into conflict. Many of the causes of this shift were outside of Hezbollah’s control; important events include the rise of Sunni terrorist groups, the 2003 American invasion and occupation of Iraq, the 2005 assassination of Rafik al-Hariri, the May 2008 political crisis in which Hezbollah seized parts of West Beirut and skirmished with Sunni militias, the outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2011, and of course Hezbollah’s decision to enter Syria.

In response to these pressures, Hezbollah has articulated a new style of Lebanese nationalism. This version of nationalism certainly differs from Christian nationalism, but the two share similarities. During the heady days of secular Arab nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s, Shi‘is participated in nationalist movements as *Arabs*, not as *Shi‘is*. These movements, like the Arab world, remained dominated by Sunnis. The collapse of Arab nationalism after the Israeli victories in 1967 and 1973 corresponded with a rise in Sunni Islamism – rather than focusing on Arab identities as the basis for governance, these movements focused on Sunni identities. Naturally, these movements offered little to Shi‘is.

¹⁹¹ Haytham Mouzahem, “Lebanese president provokes outcry with Hezbollah comment,” *Al-Monitor*, March 3, 2017.

The Iranian Revolution and subsequent Islamic Republic offered a model of Islamic life beyond the Sunni-dominated models which had predominated in recent years. Hezbollah adopted this model and for many years structured its rhetoric and behavior around this Iranian ideal. But this model has become unsustainable for Hezbollah, particularly since the 2003 Iraq War and the 2011 Arab Spring. Sunni-Shi'i sectarianism has replaced the Israeli-Arab conflict as the region's most prominent issue, and Hezbollah has been forced to articulate a type of Lebanese nationalism in response. This nationalism still incorporates Hezbollah's confrontations with Israel and the West and its transnational linkages with Iran, but it is centered around the need to preserve the Lebanese state – Hezbollah's haven – as a bastion for minority rights.

Moving forward, Hezbollah's viability depends upon factors both inside and outside of the group's locus of control. Hezbollah is just one element of the broader Axis of Resistance and, as much as the group has recently sought to disengage its identity from the complex realms of international relations and geopolitics, Hezbollah is dependent on the survival and continued support of its allies in Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Israel also poses a real threat to Hezbollah, especially as some of its best troops fight in Syria. An attempted knockout blow by Israel is unlikely but certainly possible, and an inadvertent border clash between Israel and Hezbollah could certainly lead to a broader escalation.

Hezbollah's relations with the Palestinian Sunni Islamist Hamas movement, which operates primarily in the Gaza Strip, has been an interesting case study in terms of the intersection of sectarianism and geopolitics. The two groups, despite sectarian differences, have long worked together in their battles against Israel. Both have received financial and ideological support from Iran, and Hezbollah served as an intermediary between Iran and Palestinian actors during the al-Aqsa Intifada (2000-2005).¹⁹² Hamas, which had long had its headquarters in Damascus, moved it to Qatar after the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War. Gazan public opinion has overwhelmingly favored the Syrian opposition, and Hamas has almost certainly faced pressure from Arab Gulf states to dissociate itself from Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran. But strategically, Hamas and Hezbollah depend on one another's continued existence. If Israel were to attempt

¹⁹² Blanford, *Warriors of God*, Chapter 9.

to expel Hamas from Gaza, Hezbollah could threaten the country with Iranian missiles. Likewise, if it were to attempt a master stroke against Hezbollah in South Lebanon, Hamas could terrorize Israeli cities through rocket attacks and suicide bombings.

Nevertheless, as exemplified in the speeches analyzed in this paper, Hezbollah has taken proactive steps to limit the damage to its identity as a result of its campaign in Syria. The competing March 14th-March 8th alliance structure which emerged after the assassination of Rafik al-Hariri will continue to define Lebanese politics for the foreseeable future. From a parliamentary perspective, Hezbollah needs Shi'i and Christian support to deflect criticism and further its political agendas, and it will continue to frame its rhetoric in ways which target these groups in particular. The group has also partnered with the Lebanese Armed Forces, the commander of which is customarily a Maronite Christian, in confronting Sunni terrorists in Eastern Lebanon.¹⁹³ The Lebanese Army is a particularly attractive partner for Hezbollah since it adds a veneer of legitimacy to the group. While among hardline Sunnis the Lebanese Army has lost most of its legitimacy, it remains a national, multi-sectarian force and thus an ideal actor to legitimize some of Hezbollah's domestic security operations.

Hezbollah is a complex organization embedded in a complex regional and international situation. The group defies easy explanations and its decisions are difficult to predict. The al-Assad regime's survival remains uncertain, especially considering the mercurial nature of the Trump administration. If the regime were to fall, Hezbollah would be in grave danger. The group's supply routes would be threatened without its key Syrian ally and, for the foreseeable future, Hezbollah's reputation would remain tarnished in most of the Sunni Muslim world – most of these factors are outside of the group's control, and there is very little Nasrallah could do on a rhetorical level to protect Hezbollah.

If the al-Assad regime remains in power, Hezbollah's future viability will be determined by its success in articulating an ideology that appeals not only to the group's natural Shi'i constituencies, but to Lebanese Christians. So far, Hezbollah has been successful in these regards. Under the leadership of Nasrallah, the group has effectively rebranded itself – barring drastic events, the group will continue to be

¹⁹³ Daniel Byman and Bilal Saab, *Hezbollah in a Time of Transition*. (Atlantic Council, Brookings Institution, 2014), 3.

a powerful actor in Lebanon and the region. Hezbollah has survived previous crises, defying the prediction of qualified observers in the region and in Western countries. Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice described the 2006 Lebanon War as “the birth pangs of a new Middle East,” presumably referring to the impending destruction of Hezbollah and the full alignment of Lebanon towards America and the West.¹⁹⁴ Clearly her vision was not forthcoming – Hezbollah emerged from the 2006 War with support from a vast majority of Arabs, Sunni and Shi‘i alike, and even branded the 2006 War as a victory. Hezbollah will likely emerge from the Syrian Civil War changed and damaged, but not defeated.

Avenues for Future Research

Prospects for future research based off this project span multiple fields of study, including history, political science, media studies, and religious studies. Comparative studies of Hezbollah and other groups offer considerable promise. Non-state, paramilitary actors have proliferated in recent years, and particularly since the 2003 American invasion of Iraq and the 2011 Arab Spring. Groups such as the Popular Mobilization Forces, a Shi‘i Iraqi umbrella organization which receives support from Iran, Yemen’s Houthi Ansar Allah movement, and the pro-Russian separatist Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics are quite young compared to Hezbollah and could be examined in comparison to the organization. Melani Cammett conducted an interesting study of sectarian welfare provision within Lebanon. A similar project which focuses on Christian participation in Hezbollah’s social services since the Syrian Civil War could supplement public opinion surveys in gauging Hezbollah-Christian linkages. A final potential project is an updated longitudinal study of Hezbollah’s ideological shifts, incorporating the group’s communications from the 1980s until the Syrian Civil War.

¹⁹⁴ “Secretary Rice Holds a News Conference,” *CQ Transcripts* Wire.

Works Cited

- Abdullah Azzam Brigades, “Bayan bishan ghazwat al-mustashariyya al-Iraniyya fi Beirut,” (statement regarding the bombing of the Iranian Embassy in Beirut).
<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/e28098abd-allah-e28098azzc481m-brigades-22on-the-raid-of-the-iranian-cultural-center-in-beirut22.pdf>
- A Global “No” To a Nuclear-Armed Iran.* (Pew Research Center, 2012)
<http://www.pewglobal.org/2012/05/18/a-global-no-to-a-nuclear-armed-iran/>
- Bahrain Future, “هذا هو قاسم سليماني | This is Qasem Soleimani,” YouTube, September 27, 2015.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUGnyN1iTk>
- Baker, Aryn, “The Abdullah Azzam Brigades: Behind the Terrorist Group That Bombed Iran’s Beirut Embassy,” *Time*, November 20, 2013. <http://world.time.com/2013/11/20/the-abdullah-azzam-brigades-behind-the-group-that-bombed-irans-beirut-embassy/>
- Barnard, Anne, Michael Gordon, and Jodi Rudoren. “Israel Targeted Iranian Missiles in Syria Attack,” *New York Times*, May 4, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/05/world/middleeast/israel-syria.html?_r=0
- Blanford, Nicholas. *Killing Mr. Lebanon: The Assassination of Rafik Hariri and its Impact on the Middle East*. I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2009.
- Blanford, Nicholas. *Warriors of God: Inside Hezbollah’s Thirty-Year Struggle Against Israel*. Random House, 2011.
- Byman, Daniel and Bilal Saab, *Hezbollah in a Time of Transition*. (Atlantic Council, Brookings Institution, 2014) <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Hezbollah-in-a-Time-of-Transition.pdf>
- Byman, Daniel, *Deadly Connections*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- Cammett, Melani. *Compassionate Communalism: Welfare and Sectarianism in Lebanon*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014.

- Connor, Philip and Conrad Hackett, *Middle East's Christian population in flux as Pope Francis visits Holy Land*. (Pew Research Center, 2014) <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/05/19/middle-easts-christian-population-in-flux-as-pope-francis-visits-holy-land/>
- ElectronicResistance. "Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah Speech - 30/4/13 (ENGLISH SUBS)," YouTube. May 7, 2013.
- el Hour, Walid, *The meaning of resistance: Hezbollah's media strategies and the articulation of a people*, (Amsterdam: Rozenberg Publishers, 2012), 87.
- Felsch, Maximilian, *Christian Nationalism in Lebanon*. In M. Felsch and M. Wählisch, *Lebanon and the Arab Uprisings: In the eye of the hurricane*. (London: Routledge, 2016).
- Glass, Charles. *Syria Burning: A Short History of a Catastrophe*. Verso, 2016.
- Hadid, Diaa and Anne Barnard, "Commander of Hezbollah Freed by Israel is Killed in Syria," *The New York Times*, December 20, 2015.
- Hassanally, Shabbir, "Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah(HA) – Speech – May 9, 2013 – 25th Anniversary al-Nour Radio – English," YouTube, May 9, 2013.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MxWKTOKW5s>
- Hassanally, Shabbir, "Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah(HA) – Speech – Saturday, May 25, 2013 – Eid Muqawamah wat-Tahrir," YouTube, May 25, 2013.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHHnYwr2044&t=1607s>
- Hassan Nasrallah, "كلمة الأمين العام لحزب الله السيد حسن نصرالله في الحفل التأسيسي للشهيد حسان اللقيس 20-12-2013," YouTube, December 20, 2013, 11:30. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45hK8xzg5Zc>
- Harris, William. *Lebanon: A History, 600-2011*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Heinz Halm, *The Shiites: A Short History*, (Markus Wiener: Princeton, 2007). (Translated from German by Allison Brown)
- Heistein, Ari, "Iran's Support for Syria Pragmatic, not Religious (or, Who are the Alawites?)," *Informed Comment*, August 19, 2015. <https://www.juancole.com/2015/08/secular-alawites-crescent.html>

“Hezbollah commander Hassan Lakkis killed in Beirut,” *BBC*, December 4, 2013.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25211759>

“Hezbollah Official Assassinated in Hadath, Israel Held Responsible,” *Al Manar*, December 4, 2013.

<http://archive.almanar.com.lb/english/article.php?id=123792>

Hoffman, Bruce, *Recent Trends and Future Prospects of Iranian Sponsored International Terrorism*,

(RAND Corporation, 2012). <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a237637.pdf>

Hubbard, Ben, “Cables Released by WikiLeaks Reveal Saudis’ Checkbook Diplomacy,” *The New York*

Times, June 20, 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/21/world/middleeast/cables-released-by-wikileaks-reveal-saudis-checkbook-diplomacy.html?_r=0

Khatib, Lina. *The Hizbullah Phenomenon*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

Al-Khoei, Hayder, *Syria, Iraq and the Struggle for Power: Intertwined Futures*. (London: Chatham

House, 2016) <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/syria-iraq-and-struggle-power-intertwined-futures>

Khomeini, Ruhollah. *Islamic Government*. Tehran: The Institute for Compilation and Publication of

Imam Khomeini’s Works (International Affairs Division), 1970.

Laclau, Ernesto, *On populist reason*, (London: Verso, 2007).

Al-Majid, Majid bin Mohammad, “A message to the Shia of Lebanon.”

<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/mc481jid-bin-mue1b8a5ammad-al-mc481jid-22message-to-lebanons-shc4abah22-en.pdf>

Maloney, Suzanne, *Iran’s Political Economy Since the Revolution*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

McCants, William, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic*

State. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2015).

McCarthy, Niall, “The Countries With The Most Refugees Per 1,000 Inhabitants [Infographic],” *Forbes*,

June 18, 2015. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2015/06/18/the-countries-with-the-most-refugees-per-1000-inhabitants-infographic/#13c6bf185561>.

McHugo, John. *Syria: A Recent History*. London: Saqi Books, 2015.

Middle East Observer, "Hezbollah's Leader to Christians: 'Where are your Churches, Crosses, & Nuns?' – English Subtitles," YouTube, 0:21. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OcaWCUWBVc>

"Middle East 2015: Current and Future Challenges," *Zagby Research Services*, November 2015.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/52750dd3e4b08c252c723404/t/5667940fbfe8731ec365efa7/1449628687692/Sir+Bani+Yas+2015+Letter+FINAL.pdf>

"Middle East 2016: Current Conditions & the Road Ahead," *Zagby Research Services*, November 2016.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/52750dd3e4b08c252c723404/t/58509580ff7c5039b9505e67/1481676164948/SBY2016+FINAL.pdf>

Mixed Views of Hamas and Hezbollah in Largely Muslim Nations: Little Enthusiasm for Many Muslim Leaders. (Pew Research Center, 2010) <http://www.pewglobal.org/2010/02/04/mixed-views-of-hamas-and-hezbollah-in-largely-muslim-nations/>

Moojan, Moman. *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism*. Yale University Press, 1985.

Moukhalati, Dana, "Breaking down Ahmad al-Assir: the man behind the beard," *Al Arabiya*, June 25, 2013. <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/profiles/2013/06/25/Breaking-down-Ahmad-al-Assir-the-man-behind-the-beard.html>

Mouzahem, Haytham, "Lebanese president provokes outcry with Hezbollah comment," *Al-Monitor*, March 3, 2017. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/03/lebanon-president-defend-hezbollah-weapons.html>

MTVLebanonNews, "Press Conference – Hasan Nasrallah Speech - 29/03/2014," YouTube, March 29, 2014, 53:30. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GaZ0ztCKc6g>

MTVLebanonNews, "Press Conference – Hassan Nasrallah 16 Aug 2013," YouTube, August 16, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9ov6uMk30M&t=3037s>

Nasrallah, Hassan and Michel Aoun, "Memorandum of understanding by Hezbollah and the Free patriotic movement," *Voltaire Network*, February 6, 2006. <http://www.voltairenet.org/article163916.html>

- Norton, Augustus Richard. *Amal and the Shi'a*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987.
- Norton, Augustus Richard. *Hezbollah: A Short History*. Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Oran, Michael. *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Salem, Paul, *Lebanon*. In S. Lust (Ed.), *The Middle East*, (CQ, 2013).
- “Secretary Rice Holds a News Conference,” *CQ Transcripts Wire*. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/21/AR2006072100889.html>
- Smith, Philip, “Culture and Charisma: Outline of a Theory,” *Acta Sociologica* 43, January 1, 2000.
- Shaery-Eisenlohr, Roschanack. *Shi'ite Lebanon: Transnational Religion and the Making of National Identities*. Columbia University Press, 2008.
- Shlaim, Avi, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014).
- Solomon, Erika, “Al Qaeda-linked group claims Beirut bombing,” February 19, 2014.
<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-blast-idUSBREA1I0BQ20140219>
- “Syria rebels capture northern Raqqa city,” *Al-Jazeera*, March 4, 2013.
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/03/201334151942410812.html>
- “Syria Regional Refugee Response,” *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*.
<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>
- Syrie*Syria_Siria: Interview, Documentaire, Discours, Analyse, “Interview exclusive de Sayed Hassan Nasrallah sur la chaîne libanaise OTV. (En arabe, 03/12/2013)” YouTube, December 4, 2013, 24:00. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9kfQirHZvs>
- “The complete story behind the life and death of Hassan al-Laqqis,” *Kataeb.org*, June 30, 2014.
<http://www.kataeb.org/news/2014/06/30/the-complete-story-behind-the-life-and-death-of#>
- “The New Hezbollah Manifesto,” November 2009.
<http://www.lebanonrenaissance.org/assets/Uploads/15-The-New-Hezbollah-Manifesto-Nov09.pdf>

“The Structure of Power in Iran: An overview of the Iranian government and political system,” *Frontline*.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/tehran/inside/govt.html> - snsc

Traboulsi, Fawwaz, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, (London: Pluto Press, 2007).

“Text of Nasrallah’s May 9 speech,” *NOW*, May 9, 2013.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/hezbollah-leader-sayyed-hassan-nasrallah-speaks-live>

“Treasury Targets Hizballah for Supporting the Assad Regime.” U.S. Department of the Treasury Press Release. August 10, 2012.

“Two-thirds of Lebanon’s Christians believe Hezbollah is protecting country,” *Al-Akhbar*, October 21, 2014. <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/22129>

Weinthal, Benjamin, “Europe Has a Serious Hezbollah Problem,” *The Tower*, May 2013.

<http://www.thetower.org/article/europe-has-a-serious-hezbollah-problem/>

Whewell, Tim, “Syrian activists flee abuse in al-Qaeda-run Raqqa,” *BBC*, November 13, 2013.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-24926584>

Wiegand, Krista, *Bombs and Ballots: Governance by Islamist Terrorist and Guerilla Groups*, (London: Routledge, 2010).

Worth, Robert and Nada Bakri, “Hezbollah Seizes Swath of Beirut from U.S.-Backed Lebanon Government,” *The New York Times*, 10 May 2008.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/10/world/middleeast/10lebanon.html>

Zelin, Aaron, *Jihadism in Lebanon*. In M. Felsch and M. Wählisch, *Lebanon and the Arab Uprisings: In the eye of the hurricane*. (London: Routledge, 2016).